



SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

*Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee,
O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help,
and who is the sword of thy excellency!
and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee;
and thou shalt tread upon their high places.*

Deuteronomy 33:29

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*If by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace.
But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*
—Romans 11:6

Pure grace.
It is of grace. It is not of works.
The apostle speaks of a remnant preserved according to the election of grace, so *election* is of grace and not of works. He speaks of that remnant as they knew God and in the face of death did not bow to Baal, so *salvation* is by grace and not of works. The apostle speaks of that remnant as preserved in those perilous times, so *preservation* is by grace and not of works.

Election by pure grace.

Enjoyment of God as our God by pure grace.

Preservation by pure grace.

Heaven by pure grace.

Salvation by pure grace.

So much are salvation and grace to be identified that the apostle simply calls salvation “grace.” Whatever you say of salvation, you say of grace. Whatever you say of grace, you say of salvation. Salvation is by pure grace. Salvation is pure grace.

Grace does not enable you to be saved. Grace does not enable you to do what you must do to be saved. Grace does not enable you to be active, so that by your activity of doing what is called for or is required, you are saved as a consequence. Grace does not bring salvation very near to you and leave it within your power whether you will be saved. Grace does not give to you only part of salvation and leave a part for you to accomplish.

Grace brings salvation into your possession and grants to you all of salvation. As soon as you have grace, you have salvation. Grace saves. Grace is salvation.

Perhaps, it is especially preservation by pure grace that is on the forefront in Romans 11:6. All the day long God stretched forth his hands to a disobedient and a gainsaying people! To them he sent the prophets, rising up early and sitting up late and testifying against them. God sent to them many preachers. By that means he gave to them the gospel in its purest and most glorious expression. Some of the prophets the people killed. Other prophets they neglected, tortured, imprisoned, and ridiculed. The people pressed their prophets out of measure until they interceded against Israel! A nation wholly backslidden and apostate. Many in Israel were exposed in their unbelief. And unbelieving and carnal to the core, they were hardened and cut off under the preaching of the gospel.

Before long the entire nation was carried away into captivity. Yet God’s people were not cut off. For there was always a remnant according to the election of grace.

Pure grace.

This was true of national Israel during the time of Elijah the prophet. Israel appeared wholly apostate. An inconceivably wicked queen stirred up her equally evil husband to commit unthinkable iniquity. The prophets of God were hunted like animals! The people of God were slaughtered like beasts! Baal was called the God of the covenant! The temple of Baal was the temple of the nation!

The elect church of God disappeared during those perilous times, hidden in caves and dens of the earth and fed surreptitiously by the faithful in high places. Even Elijah fled, and at Mount Sinai he made intercession *against* Israel: “Lord, they have killed thy prophets and thrown down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.”

But what did God say? “I have reserved to myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.”

Preserved by pure grace.

Saved by pure grace.

Elected of pure grace.

Even so, during the time of the apostle Paul, there was a remnant according to the election of grace.

The apostate nation of Israel showed herself to be an enemy of the gospel and of her own Messiah. The Jews saw with their eyes the very Word of God, they heard him with their ears, and they handled him with their hands. Being ignorant of God’s righteousness, they went about to establish their own righteousness by obedience to the law of Moses. When their Messiah made their righteousness nothing but condemnation and told them that they could not come to him except his Father draw them, they murdered their Messiah. When he made salvation to be all of grace and not of works, they killed the holy and the just one.

Yet there was a remnant according to the election of grace! Was not Paul an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham and of the tribe of Benjamin? Although the whole nation of Israel was destroyed, God’s people were never destroyed.

Such is God's way always, the way of pure grace.

We are then justified in making a general application for this present time and for all time. Although denominations and institutions perish; although many mighty and learned men perish in their opposition to the truth, and whole multitudes follow them to perdition, there is always a remnant preserved by pure grace. When the gospel goes out to the ends of the earth and is rejected of many, there is always a remnant saved by pure grace.

Elected of pure grace.

Saved by pure grace.

Preserved by pure grace.

God and heaven by pure grace.

Not of works!

These two—grace and works—are contrasted. The contrast is absolute. If salvation is of grace, then you may never attribute salvation to works; otherwise you deny grace. If salvation is of works, then you may never talk about grace; otherwise work is not work. It does not matter in what sense someone attributes salvation to works. If someone says that salvation is of works, then he may never talk about grace. If salvation is of grace, then salvation cannot be by works at all. Salvation by grace and salvation by works are antithetical. Salvation is either of pure grace alone, or salvation is all of works.

Especially forbidden is a toxic mingling of grace and works. Salvation is either of pure grace or of pure works. It is never of grace and works because then grace is no more grace, and work is no more work. If salvation is in the slightest of works, then it cannot in the slightest be by grace.

Grace and works?

No!

Grace or works.

They are antithetical.

Grace either brings salvation to you entirely, or you must labor for salvation entirely. Grace either gives to you salvation entirely and wholly apart from your works, or you must work for your salvation wholly and entirely apart from grace.

And concerning your works—any and all works—your works are determined for you and given unto you, so that they are fruits of salvation. Works gain and obtain no blessing of salvation. Either that, or you must earn your salvation wholly by your works. You either gain, obtain, receive, and are given your salvation by pure grace; or you gain, obtain, receive, merit, and are given your salvation by pure works. Either God gives you his blessing by pure grace; or you obey the law, and then you receive God's blessing. Either God gives you his blessing wholly and completely apart from your law-keeping, or you receive his blessing for your law-keeping. Then also, the more

you obey, the more blessings you receive; and if you fail in the least—if you are not perfect in all that you are and in all that you do—you must go to hell. Remember that: if your doctrine is that the more you obey, the more you are blessed, this is also true of you: if you fail in the least thing, you must certainly perish forever in hell.

Grace or works.

Absolute antithesis.

Grace is one thing.

Work is an entirely different and mutually exclusive thing.

By grace can never include by works. And by works can never include by grace.

Otherwise, grace is not grace, and works are not works.

Surely, there was work involved in your salvation. Work must be pure work to be work. Your salvation was by work. Grace and work cannot be mingled at this point either. Salvation was by pure work. Christ earned salvation. He established everlasting righteousness for his people on the perfect and unassailable foundation of his own obedience. Work was work for Christ Jesus. He finished his work. His is the only work that is necessary for salvation. His righteousness, holiness, and perfection imputed to his people. Perfect in God's counsel. Perfect at the cross. Perfect to all eternity. Perfect work. Pure work. God did not spare his Son any punishment, and Christ Jesus spared no labor in order to accomplish the whole will and counsel of God for our redemption.

And now from heaven, as the living Lord, he works our salvation. The whole application of salvation is his work by his Holy Spirit. All his work to accomplish salvation was God's work. All his work to apply salvation is God's work. Oh, yes, pure work. His work! Not yours! How could someone say without being accused of the grossest blasphemy, "This is my activity, which is *not* God's work"?

Salvation, given to us by pure grace. Salvation was appointed to us in the counsel of God, so that it was really ours in eternity. Salvation is given to us in our own hearts and minds and consciences and experiences, so that we taste that the Lord is good, partake of his grace, and enjoy his salvation. We are preserved in the enjoyment of that salvation unto heavenly glory among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

By pure grace.

Not of works at all: not because of our works; not by our works; not in the way of our works. Salvation is not in the way of works.

The way of salvation is one of pure grace. But it is strange that when many speak of that way of salvation, they shout, "In the way of work!" Covenant fellowship on the basis of Christ's obedience, by faith alone, and in

the way of works is their mantra about their gospel. It is not gospel at all, and their mantra transgresses the fundamental law of Romans 11:6, which forbids the mingling of grace and work.

Understand now that salvation and covenant fellowship are the same. Covenant fellowship is not in the way of works. The experience of covenant fellowship is not in the way of works. *In the way of works* is an evil denial of the apostle's antithesis and the Holy Spirit's doctrine that the way of salvation is the way of pure grace. In the way of works, in the way of obedience, in the way of labor, and in the way of working are all synonymous.

These all must be cast from you as a poisonous snake that will bite you and whose venom will slowly but surely destroy your Reformed nerves until your Reformed heart stops beating, and your Reformed mind becomes numbed and eventually dies by the venom of *in the way of obedience*. Once bitten and without the antidote of pure grace, you will think that covenant fellowship is in the way of your works, until *in the way of works* destroys all the gospel truth of salvation by pure grace. Once the venom sets in, you cannot conceive of, you cannot stand to hear preached, and you cannot stand to read *grace without works*. Grace without works angers you, and you will fight against it and blaspheme it as the lie of antinomianism. Then, that venom of *in the way of works* has destroyed your Reformed sensibility and taken your spiritual life. *In the way of obedience* is a deadly injection.

It is venom injected by vipers. And those vipers are ministers who cannot themselves stand to hear, to read, to preach, and to write about *grace without works*. They blaspheme it as antinomian and show that they themselves have never tasted the sweetness of the gospel.

They may speak of grace. They may say that you do not work for your salvation. They may deceptively whisper in their sermons that you do not contribute even one sigh to your salvation. But they say that covenant fellowship is in the way of works, in the way of obedience, in the way of your activity, which is *not* God's act. They cannot say grace, preach grace, teach grace, or write grace without including works. Always it is by grace *and* in the way of works. Their venom is the toxic combination of grace and works. For those vipers grace and works always belong together. This breed is very old. It is as old as Cain's sacrifice and ancient Israel's idolatry; as old as the

false apostles in Galatia, who mingled grace and works; as old as the self-righteousness of Rome; and as old as the faith of the Arminians. "We do this all by grace," they say. But *doing* by grace is the only grace they know. See what grace makes of a man! Grace that makes something of man is the only grace they know. Grace that enables man *to do* is the only grace they preach. The old error seeks to cloak itself in a deceptive camouflage, but it is the same toxic venom of grace and works.

That venom eats at the whole truth of salvation by pure grace as slowly but as surely as the poison of asps destroys the body. When that venomous error of grace and works achieves the ascendancy in the church, it will kill or drive out salvation by pure grace. For these two—salvation by pure grace and salvation by works—are absolutely antithetical. The one is of God. The other is of the devil. The one gives all the glory to God. The other gives all the glory to man. The one saves. The other damns.

For when the apostle says, "By works," he speaks of us. He speaks of man's obedience to the law. The apostle refers also to all of man's spiritual activities. Therefore, you must add *not of works* to all man's spiritual activities, such as faith and repentance. Salvation does not have its explanation in man's obedi-

ence or in man's performance of spiritual activities, even required and necessary activities. Salvation and blessing and goodness from God are not by works, efforts, activities, and labors of man. Since salvation is covenant fellowship with God, covenant fellowship is not in the way of obedience to the law, in the way of works, efforts, activities, and labors of man. Since the blessing of God is salvation, the blessing of God is not in the way of obedience, in the way of works, efforts, activities, and labors of man. If you say that salvation and blessing and God's goodness are in the way of these things, then you may not speak of grace anymore. Then all is only by works.

Salvation is not by works!

Hallelujah! Not by works!

Contrasting with works is grace. Grace is the beauty of God and his divine loveliness as the God who is perfect and the implication of every perfection. He is the God of grace. He is all grace. That beauty and loveliness of God toward sinners is his attitude of favor toward them. He delights in them. He loves them and is merciful toward them. And that grace of God is, then, the power of God that works their salvation. Grace is God. What you say

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of grace, you say of God. Grace is the power of God to work, give, grant, and affect all of the salvation that he wills for his people in his grace. That grace is shown to the undeserving, to those who have no right to it, to those who by their sins have totally forfeited grace, to those in whom there is neither will nor ability to do that which is good and pleasing to God. Grace is opposed to working. Grace is not shown to the working. Grace does not save the working, the obedient, the good, the lovely, or those who try their best. Grace saves the sinner, the ugly, the ungodly, the wicked, and the rebellious.

Salvation is by pure grace not mingled with works.

Elected of pure grace.

A remnant existed at the time of Ahab and at the time of the apostle Paul. A remnant exists at this present time, and a remnant will exist in every age.

In election God appointed his people to salvation. Salvation is his living and eternal will for them, and in eternity he gave salvation to them. God gave his elect to Christ, the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world and thus the Lamb who in eternity had perfect salvation. He called his people his church and gave to each one his specific place in the church. Christ redeemed them; reconciled them; regenerated them; and called, justified, sanctified, and glorified them before the world was. They are the apple of his eye. They are graven on the palms of his hands. They are perfect in his sight. There is no condemnation to them. He does not behold iniquity in them. The reality of their salvation was before the world.

That election is determinative for salvation. Elected of pure grace, they are and must be saved by pure grace. Not by works.

Why is one saved and another not? The election obtained it.

Why does one believe and another not? Election determined it.

Why does one repent and another not? Election gave it.

Why is one regenerated and another not? Election!

Why is one justified, sanctified, and glorified and another not? Election!

Election is the source of salvation and of every benefit of salvation, of grace and of every blessing, and of all spiritual life and activity. Election is the eternal and living source. Election gives God's people their salvation in eternity, and election is the guarantee and the power by which salvation comes into their possession in time. The living will of God brings to them what God has appointed to them. God works and brings to pass all that God has willed for them.

And this eternal decree of God is one decree with reprobation. It is this that particularly highlights God's graciousness in election. Not all are elect. God did not

will salvation for everyone, but he willed damnation for many. He passed by many with the grace of election. In passing by them, he also in his sovereign and just purpose appointed them to damnation. That decree is also carried out as the work of God in which he is glorified.

Those passed by cannot believe because they are not of his sheep. There is an activity of God to blind them. He gives the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear. There is a living word of God spoken over them: "Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompense unto them: let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back away" (Rom. 11:9–10). That activity of God flows from his appointment of them to damnation and his eternal will for their destruction.

Herein is also the offense of grace. Many will have grace as long as grace leaves to man a choice, an activity, a work, a decision, an effort, a labor, or a sigh.

But election and reprobation mean that salvation is decided by God, and damnation is decided by God.

The coming of the gospel makes the will of God clear and is the power of God by which he carries out his will. No man can come to Christ, believe in Christ, and be saved by Christ unless the Father who sent Christ draw him. In both the salvation of some and in the stumbling of others, God is glorified in his goodness and severity. It is the reprobation of many that shows the pure grace of election.

The motivation of God in choosing one in distinction from another was his own will and nothing in the ones chosen. There was no worth in them. In them is found no cause for their being chosen. His choice, indeed, confounds the mighty and wise, for not many mighty, noble, and wise are chosen; but he chose the foolish things, the weak things, the base things, the things that are despised, and the things that are not, that no flesh glory in his presence.

Election was not of works. That choice of God was not based on and did not proceed from a consideration of the works of the sinner. There is an eternal election that determines one's eternal destiny. There is no election by result. There is no looking ahead to see who will believe and obey. Election determines those who will believe and obey and gives to them their faith and obedience.

If someone says that election is of works, then he may not speak of grace anymore. Indeed, if someone says that there is any part of salvation that is by works, then he may not speak of election anymore. By works in any part of salvation is the complete denial of election. Works as the way to the Father, blessedness in the way of obedience, and obeying more and receiving more blessings are all

denials of election. Ministers who teach and preach these things invariably begin to stop teaching and preaching election. Ministers who teach and preach these things may not speak of grace.

But if election is by grace, all of salvation is by grace, for the election obtains it.

Salvation by pure grace.

Salvation is the deliverance of the elect sinner from the misery of his sin and his deliverance into covenant fellowship with God.

God appointed his people to that salvation. God accomplished that salvation in Jesus Christ at the cross. You were as saved at the cross as you were saved in eternity and as saved as you ever will be. At the cross Christ paid the debt for the sins of all God's elect. Christ made a perfect atonement, satisfaction, and propitiation in the place of each elect child of God and the whole elect church and for them only. At the cross Christ accomplished all righteousness. That righteousness is worthy of life and of every blessing of salvation. Salvation—every benefit of salvation and the perfection of salvation—was merited by Christ. By the cross of Jesus Christ, believers are made perfect forever. We were saved at the cross, saved fully and completely by that cross. There, at that cross, we were reconciled to God.

That salvation, which Christ accomplished at the cross, he must also make ours so that we have it and enjoy it. It is the salvation of the sinner in his own mind, heart, experience, and whole being. Christ enters into his people by his Spirit, and he regenerates them, calls them to faith, works in them faith, justifies them by that faith alone, renews them by his Holy Spirit according to his image, and causes them to walk in all good works that he ordained for them from before the foundation of the world.

Salvation, which in a word is the eternal covenant of grace. God appointed his people in election as his covenant friends, and he establishes that covenant with them. In that covenant he gives to them salvation and every benefit of salvation to have and to enjoy, to experience and to be thankful for.

By pure grace, not of works.

Christ came by grace. By grace God wrought in the womb of Mary. For the salvation of those whom God had elected, Christ came to perfectly accomplish that

salvation, to earn for them perfect righteousness and eternal life, the Spirit, and every blessing of the Spirit. And having accomplished salvation at the cross, Christ ascended to heaven to make his people partakers of that salvation by the gift of the Spirit. The covenant and all the benefits of salvation that are given to them in the covenant come to them by grace. The favor of God that chose them is the same favor of God by which he works in them to make them partakers of Christ and of all his benefits.

Not by works, not the Spirit-wrought works of the believer. It is precisely this thought that the apostle Paul banishes from the confession that it is by grace and not of works. Works—real, genuine, Spirit-wrought works—are not that because of which God's people receive anything from God: not salvation, the experience of salvation, the knowledge of God, the love of God, the grace of God, or the assurance of salvation from God. It is not because of works, any and all works.

God's relationship to his people is a covenant of friendship and not a contract for work. Works, the works that God works in them, are not that because of which he gives anything to his people. It—salvation, the experience of salvation, the covenant, and every benefit of the covenant—is not of works. Works cannot be a part or the whole of the explanation of their blessedness from God. If

it is of works, then there may never be talk about grace again; otherwise work is not work, and grace is not grace.

And those whom God elected of grace and saved of grace, he also preserves by pure grace. If left to themselves, it is not only possible that they would perish, but it is also an absolute certainty that they would perish. Upon God they are absolutely dependent from moment to moment. He reserved them for himself, and he so preserves them by himself. So what is true of your election and your salvation both in its accomplishment and in its application is also true of your preservation: it is all of pure grace. The preservation of the child of God in his salvation is his continuance in the enjoyment of that salvation all his life long and his perfection in that salvation in eternal glory in heaven.

When God says that he reserved *to himself*, he speaks of the intimate communion of his children with himself, their dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, their protection and preservation from bowing the knee to Baal and kissing that foul idol. So God is talking about

Grace either brings salvation to you entirely, or you must labor for salvation entirely. Grace either gives to you salvation entirely and wholly apart from your works, or you must work for your salvation wholly and entirely apart from grace.

their preservation in faith and their preservation by faith in the experience of God as their God and in a holy life of obedience to God.

He reserved to himself during the perilous times of Ahab; he reserved to himself at the time of the apostle Paul; and he reserves to himself at this time and always, as long as the world shall last, a remnant according to the election of grace. When God confronts his people in their lives with the choice of God or Baal, of truth or lie, by grace or by works, God preserves to himself a remnant that says, “God, truth, by grace,” and they keep on saying that until they are killed for saying that.

God keeps them in peace in the covenant and in the fellowship of his covenant. He keeps them from sin, evil, and temptation and from perishing in their sins. He

keeps them, even if by enormous sins they depart from him. God keeps them because he infallibly renews them to repentance; and by that infallible and irresistible power of grace, he preserves them for himself until he presents them without spot or wrinkle in the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

By pure grace!

Elected of grace.

Saved of grace.

Preserved of grace.

God is ours; heaven is ours; and everlasting blessedness, life, and glory are ours by pure grace.

All glory to God, of whom and through whom and to whom are all things!

—NJL

EDITORIAL

THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL AS DEMAND OF THE COVENANT (4)

Previous editorials in this series have set forth the truth that the Christian school is a demand of the covenant. The covenant of God with believers and their seed requires that those believers work together in the rearing of their covenant seed to prepare them to serve their Lord in the vocation to which he will call them. While the form of the school may vary according to time and circumstance, there must be a Christian school or the laboring together toward the establishment of a Christian school.

The position that these editorials have taken is that of the Reformed confessions and Church Order.

What doth God require in the fourth commandment?

First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained. (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 103, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 128)

The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant. (Church Order 21, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 387)

Furthermore, the president [of classis] shall, among other things, put the following questions to the delegates of each church:

3. Are the poor and the Christian schools cared for? (Church Order 41, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 393)

Does the consistory see to it that the parents send their children to the Christian school? (Questions for church visitation. Questions to the full consistory, no. 18)

The position that these editorials have taken in harmony with the Reformed confessions and Church Order is founded on the word of God.

4. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:
5. And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.
6. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:
7. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou

sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

8. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.
9. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates. (Deut. 6:4–9)
4. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.
5. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children:
6. That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children:
7. That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments:
8. And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God. (Ps. 78:4–8)

In the statement “The Christian school is a demand of the covenant,” the most important word and concept is “covenant.” The most important word is not “demand.” The foundation and necessity of the school is not the demand but the covenant itself. Therefore, in this editorial I take up the glorious truth of God’s covenant, for in this truth the foundation of the Christian school is laid.

The Covenant

The covenant is God’s gracious relationship of friendship and fellowship that he establishes with his elect people in Jesus Christ, in which God gives himself to his people as their God and takes his people to himself as his own.

The essence of the covenant is the fellowship between God and his people in Christ. The covenant is a relationship. It is not the cold contract of a business deal, but it is the warm dwelling together of a family. Throughout scripture God uses a certain covenant formula that expresses this relationship. The formula is, “I will be your God, and you shall be my people.”

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. (Gen. 17:7)

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer. 31:33)

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. (Rev. 21:3)

That covenant formula is love language. It is the language of warm fellowship. It is the language of a husband to his wife: “I am your husband, and you are my wife; I am yours, and you are mine.” This is the covenant love language of God to his people, with whom he dwells: “I am your God, and you are my people; I am yours, and you are mine.”

The Head and Mediator of the Covenant

God establishes his covenant with his people in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is both the head and the mediator of the covenant. That Christ is the head of the covenant means that God establishes his covenant with Jesus Christ personally as the first and chief member of the covenant. God’s promise to establish his covenant with Abraham was a promise to establish that covenant with Abraham’s seed—“to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee” (Gen. 17:7). The seed in that promise is Jesus Christ. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16).

All the other members of the covenant are included in God’s covenant through the covenant head. Without Christ one is not a member of God’s covenant. Whoever belongs to Christ is a member of God’s covenant. “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29).

That Christ is the mediator of the covenant means that Christ brings his people into covenant fellowship with God. By nature God’s people have no right to God’s fellowship and no access unto God to live with him. By our original sin in Adam and by our actual sin we have rebelled against God, committed treachery against him, and polluted ourselves. In light of this treachery, how shall we ascend into the hill of the Lord?

3. Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?
4. He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. (Ps. 24:3–4)

Our Lord Jesus Christ alone has clean hands and a pure heart. He alone has not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully. He is Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the man in the psalm who may ascend into the hill of Jehovah and who may stand in God's holy place. As the mediator of the covenant, our Lord takes us with himself into God's presence. He covers our iniquity with his blood and gives us all his own righteousness and his own holy works to be counted as ours. Through Jesus and his work, we have fellowship with God.

We believe that we have no access unto God but alone through the only Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous, who therefore became man, having united in one person the divine and human natures, that we men might have access to the divine Majesty, which access would otherwise be barred against us. (Belgic Confession 26, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 56)

Election Determines the Covenant

God establishes his covenant with his people according to his eternal decree of election. Election determines the covenant. Election determines everything about the covenant. There is room for development in our understanding of the relationship between election and the covenant. In this relationship between election and the covenant, there is an old battle and there is a new battle, and we must fight in both.

The old battle was the question of “Who?” The question was, “Who determines *who* is a member of the covenant?” The Liberated churches in the 1940s and 1950s, following Klaas Schilder, answered that election does not determine covenant membership. According to their theology, the covenant promise is given at baptism to every child head for head, elect and reprobate alike; and the covenant promise is realized when the child comes to the years of discretion and fulfills the covenant conditions of faith and obedience. In essence, the Liberated answer to the question, “Who determines who is a member of the covenant?” was, “Man, by man's doing.”

The Protestant Reformed Churches, on the other hand, answered that election determines covenant membership. According to their theology, the covenant promise is only made to the elect and never to the reprobate. Because Christ is the head of the covenant, only those who are in him—which is only the elect—are members of the covenant. In essence the Protestant Reformed answer to the question, “Who determines who is a member of the covenant?” was, “God, by God's election.”

That old battle must be fought yet today against the heirs of the Liberated churches: the Canadian Reformed Churches, the American Reformed Churches, and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. This battle is a dead letter in the Protestant Reformed Churches today. They may yet have their doctrine on paper, and they may yet pay it lip service. But the Protestant Reformed Churches are not fighting that battle anymore, as evidenced by their dabbling in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), which includes the Canadian Reformed Churches as a prominent member. It remains to the Reformed Protestant Churches as the spiritual heirs and continuation of the old Protestant Reformed heritage to continue this battle. That old battle must also be fought today against the federal vision, which agrees with and builds upon the Liberated doctrine that man and man's doing determines covenant membership and that God and his election do not determine covenant membership.

That is the old battle, which continues unabated. There is also a new battle with regard to the relationship of election and the covenant. Whereas the old battle was the question of “Who?,” the new battle is the question of “What?” The question is, “Who determines *what* a covenant member enjoys in the covenant?” The Protestant Reformed Churches of late have been teaching, tolerating, and defending the doctrine that man's experience and enjoyment of God's covenant fellowship is due to man's keeping God's covenant laws. That teaching is not hard to find today, being rampant and blatant in Protestant Reformed sermons and writings. The ministers teach:

In the keeping of this covenant law is great joy. In fact, the more faithful the saints are to God's law in the grace of Jesus Christ, the more they prosper in the great blessings of the covenant. They prosper in their marriages, in their family life, and in their church life. Above all, they prosper in the enjoyment of God's covenant fellowship. “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord” (Ps. 119:1).¹

Hearing and reading this, the destroyed sheep go home believing “justification in the way of obedience.”² In essence, the Protestant Reformed answer to the question, “Who determines what a covenant member enjoys in the covenant?” is, “Man, by man's doing.”

Over against this, the Reformed Protestant Churches teach that election determines everything about the covenant, including the experience of every blessing of the covenant. In his decree of election, God not only decreed

1 James Slopsema, “Treasure in the House of the Righteous,” *Standard Bearer* 97, no. 2 [October 15, 2020]: 28.

2 See Andrew Lanning, “What the Sheep Are Saying,” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 12 (January 2022): 6–11.

whom he would save, but he decreed what he would save them unto. The blessings of the covenant are part and parcel of God's decree of election. The fellowship and communion with God that are the essence of the covenant were decreed by him. Man does not bring himself into the enjoyment of communion and fellowship with God by his obedience. Rather, God sovereignly brings man into the enjoyment of God's communion and fellowship as he has decreed. Our being gathered together in one in Christ is according to God's "good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself" (Eph. 1:9–10) and not according to man or man's doing.

The doctrine that God and not man accounts for man's enjoyment of covenant fellowship is the doctrine of the Canons of Dordt. Canons 1.7 is an especially important article, perhaps the most important article in the entire confession. Canons 1.7 is Dordt's definition of election, which is the doctrine upon which the entire confession rests. Just as all of salvation must be traced back to the fountainhead of election, so the doctrine of all five heads of the Canons must be traced back to the fountainhead of the first head and its doctrine of election. Dordt defines election not only according to the "Who?" but also according to the "What?" The Reformed doctrine of election is not only who is saved—"God... hath...chosen...a certain number of persons." The Reformed doctrine of election is also what they are saved unto—"God...hath...chosen...a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ."

Strikingly and beautifully, Canons 1.7 includes in the "What?" of election the communion and fellowship of the covenant.

This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than others, but with them involved in one common misery, God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification, and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of His Son, finally to glorify them for the demonstration of His mercy and for the praise of his glorious grace; as it is written: *According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to*

himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved (Eph. 1:4–6). And elsewhere: *Whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified* (Rom. 8:30). (*Confessions and Church Order*, 156)

In essence, the Reformed Protestant answer to the question, "Who determines what a covenant member enjoys in the covenant?" is, "God, by God's election."

It goes even further than that, of course. Not only what a covenant member *enjoys* in the covenant, but even what a covenant member *does* in the covenant are according to God's decree of election. All of the covenant member's obedience to God and service of God are according to God's election. This means that the covenant member's

obedience is inevitable. He will obey. God has decreed it. What a relief for the covenant member to know that God's election determines the covenant and that God's election determines everything about the covenant.

It is in the doctrine of election that the utter graciousness and absolute unconditionality of the covenant have their place. Man did not unite himself to

God in the covenant. God united himself to man. In this there is no room for conditions but only for grace.

It is in this matter of the relationship of election to the covenant that there is room to develop. It is here also that there are exciting battles to fight. Man's covenant theology always drifts further and further into the current of man, because man is always furiously paddling his theology further and further toward the current of man. Man is incorrigibly proud and has eyes only for himself. He is the hero of all his own stories. Show him salvation, and all he can see is his own glittering self and what he is and what he does. He is a braggart, full of vain and preposterous boasting. Above all, man must have room in his theology for man. He disguises his proud theology by calling it "balanced theology." He is not fixated on God and what God has done, you see, but he also does justice to man and what man must do. He uses the likely illustration of two train tracks to describe his theology. Every train needs two tracks to go on, after all, and the engine of man's theology rumbles along on the two parallel tracks of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. This way everyone gets his due in the covenant. God gets his due for sovereignly establishing the covenant, and man gets his due for responsibly enjoying the covenant.

Man did not unite himself to God in the covenant. God united himself to man. In this there is no room for conditions but only for grace.

But all of man's proud theology comes to rack and ruin on the doctrine of election. Election is the sovereign decree of God without regard for the will or responsibility of man. Election is the fountainhead of all salvation and the fountainhead of the covenant. Election theology is single-track theology, its single track being God's absolute sovereignty. Election theology is one-sided and without any semblance of any balance with man whatsoever. You can never balance the train of man's theology on the single track of election theology. On the single track of election theology, man's

theology is a train wreck. But the gospel that salvation is of the Lord cruises nicely and miraculously along.

How exciting that God be everything and that man be nothing!

And how exciting, and what a privilege, to be armed with the gospel truth of election to do battle against man and to make him nothing.

Next time: how this doctrine of the covenant is the foundation and necessity of the Christian school.

—AL

FROM THE EDITOR

The snow and ice are deep here at Reformed Believers Publishing headquarters as we put the finishing touches on this February 1 issue of *Sword and Shield*. We trust that the articles in this issue will help thaw the veins and stir the blood as you once again take up your sword and shield in the battle of faith.

I suppose that not everyone has warm, friendly feelings about the magazine. A man recently wrote in to inform us that he uses *Sword and Shield* for kindling fires at his hunting camp. If this particular article happens to catch that gentleman's eye before he burns it, might I suggest that he try reading the articles in this issue first, which will undoubtedly warm his blood sufficiently that he can save this kindling for a later date.

Regardless, whether you are friend or foe, we present this issue for some warm fireside reading on a cold winter's eve.

In this issue there appears an open letter from four saints in Singapore, which is their response to an article from Prof. Herman Hanko to his longstanding email forum. In his letter Professor Hanko accuses the members of the Reformed Protestant Churches of not obeying and submitting to the elders of their local congregations when they left the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). This article was especially aimed to discredit God's people in Singapore and the Philippines, since Professor Hanko sought and received approval for his letter from the session (consistory) of Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore and from Rev. Daniel Kleyn in the Philippines. Professor Hanko's article is slanderous and wicked. Its slander is that it accuses God's people in Singapore, in the Philippines, and in North America of sins they did not commit. The wickedness of the article is that it places God's people under the absolute authority of men instead of the absolute authority of Christ. The response of the

four saints in Singapore is masterful and edifying, for the saints bring God's word and the confessions to bear on the question of the obedience and submission of God's people to the elders in the church.

The joyful news in this is that God is working his reformation in Singapore. The four who have signed their names to the letter have been placed under Christian discipline by their session for holding an unsanctioned Bible study, in which Bible study the members investigated the doctrinal issues in the recent controversy in the PRC. The four members have a different view of the controversy than the PRC, and therefore the PRC's sister sprang into action to silence them. The persecution is so oppressive in Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore that the session is in the process of sending these four members to everlasting destruction for meeting together for an unauthorized Bible study that teaches an unauthorized view of the controversy! If anyone thought that the doctrinal controversy of the PRC was hers alone and that it had nothing to do with her sisters, God is currently showing that line of thinking to be wrong.

We thank the four saints in Singapore for submitting their letter for publication at our request, and may the Lord give you the joy of those who lose all for the sake of the gospel of Christ. Their letter and the article from Professor Hanko are reprinted here unedited.

Also in this issue is an edifying article by Mr. Elijah Roberts, who calls to our attention the instruction of Herman Hoeksema on the baptismal vows and the relationship of those vows to the matter of the good Christian school.

The rest of the authors in this issue are well known to the readership by now. We thank God for giving us much to write about. May God speed the truths written herein to your heart and the next issue into your hands.

—AL

Men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.—1 Chronicles 12:32

SLIPPERY MCGEOWN (2): ACTIVE FAITH AND JUSTIFICATION

Introduction

The ministers of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) continue their outrageous and shameless apostasy from Christ. The formation of the Reformed Protestant denomination is barely several months old, and there have been shocking doctrinal developments in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The ministers have come out with their theology that in the matter of repentance and drawing near to God, in a vital sense man's drawing nigh to God precedes God's drawing nigh to man; that regenerated man is not totally depraved; that there is an available grace that is different from the irresistible grace of regeneration; that man must work for his assurance; that God himself uses man's works to assure man of his salvation; that Jesus Christ did not personally accomplish every aspect of our salvation; that there are activities of man that precede the blessings of God; that the more one obeys, the greater are his blessings; and that faith and repentance are what man must do unto his justification.

This growing list of new errors must be added to the large list of their previous errors: that there are conditions for fellowship with God (which was never declared heresy); that our justification in the final judgment is by works; that there are two rails to heaven that consist of God's grace and man's responsibility; that in the end the choice of who to serve is up to us (by grace, of course); and that it is not enough for our salvation that Christ died and rose again, but we must also come to him.

I have a challenge for Reverend McGeown. Let him establish from scripture and from the Reformed creeds that repentance is the “activity of the believer...which God does not perform for us.”

A more thorough apostasy from the Reformed faith can hardly be imagined. And it will continue.

The Lord of heaven is giving the Protestant Reformed ministers and the denomination over to their errors and is pushing them down the road of apostasy. Let the man in the pew take notice. The ministers are not only uninterested in your protests, but they are also coming out with their true beliefs as fast as they can.

Faith, Not God's Act

Reverend McGeown adds to this growing list of new Protestant Reformed distinctives. In scandalous language he declares that “faith is our activity...which is *not* God's act.”¹

One of Reverend McGeown's opponents, Philip Rainey, wrote, “I affirm that the faith that justifies is God's act as much as justification itself is God's act.”²

Over against that Reverend McGeown writes, “This is impossible because justification is God's act of declaring believers righteous, while faith is our activity of trusting Jesus for salvation, which is *not* God's act.”

McGeown quotes Philip Rainey again: “If election is the cause of faith and repentance, then faith and repentance are first of all acts of God for salvation.”³

Reverend McGeown responds, “They are not: faith is a God-given and God-worked activity of the believer... Repentance is a God-given and God-worked activity of the believer.”

So for McGeown faith and repentance are not God's

1 Martyn McGeown, “Passive Faith?,” November 15, 2021, <https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/passive-faith>. Unless noted otherwise, quotations from Reverend McGeown are from this blog post.

2 Philip Rainey, “The Call of the Gospel and the Order of Salvation: A Response to Professor Engelsma,” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 8 (October 15, 2021): 28, as quoted in McGeown, “Passive Faith?”

3 Philip Rainey, “The Call of the Gospel and the Order of Salvation,” 29, as quoted in McGeown, “Passive Faith?”

acts. But note well: McGeown does not say merely that faith and repentance are man's activities. They are man's activities, *which are not God's acts*. So then also when McGeown says that faith and repentance are "God-given" and "God-worked" activities of the believer, he is simply speaking nonsense and deception. Whatever "God-given" and "God-worked" activities are for McGeown, *they are not God's acts*.

The lion may dress himself up in lambs' skins, but as they say, "*Ex ungue leonem*." McGeown speaks in a lamb's voice about Jesus, faith, righteousness, and justification. He makes many fine-sounding theological distinctions, such as "basis of our justification" and "instrument of justification." With a self-satisfied purr, he instructs his audience about what the controversy is or is not about. He puts himself out as a great defender of the faith. He is panting to be the face of the Protestant Reformed rejection of Reformed Protestant doctrine; and with the acquiescence of the Protestant Reformed hierarchy, he apparently is.

Mostly, he fritters away his time on Facebook, baiting people with unattributed quotes and manipulatively answering questions with questions. Occasionally, he will put up a Witsius quote to let everyone know that he disagrees with public condemnation of Witsius, which posting is the equivalent of a vulgar gesture that tells someone you despise that he is number one.

One wonders, what is Reverend McGeown doing?

But then he snarls, "Faith is our activity of trusting Jesus for salvation, which is *not* God's act." He wrenches the work of faith from God and clutches it to his own chest. Like Sméagol's ring, faith is McGeown's precious! No one, not even God, will take McGeown's precious. This is the defender of Protestant Reformed doctrine. This is the summary of Protestant Reformed doctrine: Faith is man's activity, which is not God's work. Repentance is man's activity, which God does not perform.

Put yourself in the final judgment, and let us see Reverend McGeown come forward and speak with the Lord. The Lord asks, "Martyr, what do you say about faith and repentance? Whose acts are they?"

And Reverend McGeown responds, "Lord, Lord, faith is my activity of trusting you for salvation; it is not your act! Repentance likewise is my activity, and you, Lord, did not perform it!" If he teaches this to the world, he must tell it to the Lord in the final judgment.

These two sentences—Faith is man's activity, which is not God's work. Repentance is man's activity, which God does not perform—tell you everything that you need to know about Reverend McGeown's view of faith, his corruption of justification, and more basically his idea of grace and spiritual activity in man. These two sentences more than any other summarize the appalling apostasy of

the Protestant Reformed Churches and the peril in which all stand who subject themselves and their children to this robbery of God.

McGeown insists that there is no difference between the Protestant Reformed Churches and the Reformed Protestant Churches in the doctrine of justification, as far as the "ground/basis" of justification is concerned. He writes,

The issue is not, *on what basis* are we justified before God, but *how* does the righteousness of Christ become ours?...It is alleged that there are some who deny the passivity of faith and insist on an "active faith," because they erroneously teach that faith's activities are part of the ground/basis of our justification. However, no theologian in the PRC believes this. To suggest that we disagree about the ground/basis of our justification before God is false.

So for Reverend McGeown there is no disagreement that Christ alone is the "ground/basis" of our righteousness.

But what is the issue then?

He writes,

There is a difference between the PRC and the RPC on the instrument of justification... The difference is not that PRC theologians teach that justification is by means of works, which would be false doctrine and heresy. The difference is concerning the activity or passivity of faith in justification. Is faith an *active* or a *passive* instrument?

I will grant him the positive statement regarding the difference between the denominations.

We then allege that with his idea of active faith, that it "is *not* God's act," and with his rejection of passive faith, he establishes the Protestant Reformed position that makes faith man's work and what man must do for justification. In making faith what man must do for justification, the PRC add to the ground of justification and deny Christ's work alone as the only ground of justification.

We charge that thus the PRC corrupt the doctrine of justification by faith alone in the same way the Arminians do. The PRC make faith the new obedience; the PRC make faith man's activity and not God's work; the PRC make faith what man must do to be justified and saved.

Repentance, Man's Work

In order to understand Reverend McGeown's concept of faith, we must begin with an examination of his idea of spiritual activity in man. Here we can start with repentance. He writes,

Repentance is a God-given and God-worked activity of the believer, the activity of sorrowing over sin and turning from it, which God does not *perform* for us, and without which God does not forgive sin (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 3:19; 2 Cor. 7:10).

I note for the record that Reverend McGeown should give his exegesis of these passages and not merely cite them as though they support his position that repentance is the activity of the believer, “which God does not *perform* for us.” The cited verses do not support this teaching.

I have my exegesis of those passages and will give it, if he will show from those passages that repentance is the activity of the believer, “which God does not *perform* for us.”

In fact, I have a challenge for Reverend McGeown. Let him establish from scripture and from the Reformed creeds that repentance is the “activity of the believer...which God does not *perform* for us.”

For Reverend McGeown, whatever “God-given and God-worked activity” means, it does not mean that God *performs* that activity for us, but that activity is very much man’s own activity, and without that activity God does not forgive us.

But here Reverend McGeown contradicts scripture. I think that everyone would agree that Jeremiah 31:18–19 is a classic text on repentance. There we read,

18. I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God.
19. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.

In this passage Ephraim speaks, and he says that God turned him, and Ephraim was turned. He also says that after he was turned, he repented. In the same vein he says that after he was instructed, he smote upon his thigh, and he was ashamed and even confounded. Now, all of these—repenting, smiting his thigh, being ashamed, and being confounded—are part of the turning and are synonymous with turning. Ephraim explains what God did

when God turned Ephraim. About that turning he does not say that “God does not *perform*” it for him. Rather, Ephraim gives God all the credit for the turning. God turned Ephraim. God did the turning, and Ephraim was turned. This includes all of his spiritual activity in the turning. Ephraim repented, smote on his thigh, and was ashamed. This is all included in God’s turning of Ephraim. It is not at all inappropriate in light of these verses to say that God *performed* the turning for Ephraim. The passage surely does not create a contrast between the work of God in turning Ephraim and Ephraim’s repenting or a contrast between God’s work and Ephraim’s activity. The text makes all of Ephraim’s activity the work of God. Repentance is God’s work and act from beginning to end. Turning is the work of God, and thus so is the repenting, smiting on one’s thigh, and shame. That is all God’s work. He *performs* it.

But Reverend McGeown creates a contrast between God’s gift and man’s activity. For McGeown, man’s activity “is *not* God’s act,” and God “does not *perform*” it. There are two tracks in McGeown’s idea of spiritual gifts. There is God’s gift, and there is man’s performance. Man’s performance is not the inevitable fruit of God’s gift.

Man’s performance is not what God gives. *God* gives, and *man* must perform, and together this is repentance.

Then Reverend McGeown adds to this: Without repentance—God-given but not God’s work, but man’s activity—“God does not forgive sin.” Forgiveness is the blessing that comes to man as he *performs*—*man* performs, not God—repentance.

All of McGeown’s qualifications, adjectives, and descriptions are nothing more than camouflage for the naked doctrine that repentance is man’s activity and not God’s and that God blesses man’s activity of repentance with forgiveness. This is no longer forgiveness *in the way of* repentance. This is forgiveness *because of* repentance or forgiveness *conditioned on* repentance.

Reverend McGeown and other Protestant Reformed ministers and professors say that they are teaching about *in the way of*. But they truck in a freight train load of false doctrine with that phrase. And now we know what they mean: they mean man’s activity that “is *not* God’s act” and that “God does not *perform* for us.”

This conception of spiritual gifts goes back to Reverend McGeown’s understanding of *grace*. His understanding of grace is Arminian and Pelagian. His understanding of grace is that God enables man to do what man must

Because Reverend McGeown’s gospel is that faith is man’s activity, “which is *not* God’s act,” McGeown corrupts the “ground/basis” of justification.

do to be saved. Grace does not accomplish salvation. In the case of repentance, grace enables man to do what man must do to be forgiven.

Corruption of Justification

What McGeown does with repentance, he also does with faith. It is this same double-tracked thinking that permits him to say about faith,

This [“that the faith that justifies is God’s act as much as justification itself is God’s act”] is impossible because justification is God’s act of declaring believers righteous, while faith is our activity of trusting Jesus for salvation, which is *not* God’s act.

Faith is an activity of man that “is *not* God’s act.” That is bold. That is a total corruption of the Reformed idea of faith as a gift. Whatever Reverend McGeown means by faith as a gift, it very definitely does not include faith as an activity. That “is *not* God’s act.” There is for McGeown some aspect of faith—its activity—that “is *not* God’s act.” This is also what Reverend McGeown means then by “active faith.” He means that the activity of faith is not God’s work.

Now, that is altogether shocking because about faith and man’s believing the Reformed creeds are crystal clear. Canons 3–4.14 explains that faith is the gift of God:

Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God...because it is in reality conferred, breathed, and infused into him [man]...He [God] who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 169)

God produces faith. He produces the will to believe, and he produces believing. Believing is God’s work. In the creed there is no disjunction between God’s work and man’s activity. God produces believing in man. That is Reformed.

You cannot fit Reverend McGeown’s definition of faith into this article of the Canons. He says that faith is man’s activity, which is not God’s work. The Canons say that God works (produces) “the will to believe and the act of believing also.”

Because Reverend McGeown’s gospel is that faith is man’s activity, “which is *not* God’s act,” McGeown corrupts the “ground/basis” of justification. In his view of justification, there are two works. There is faith as man’s activity, “which is *not* God’s act,” and there is Christ’s work. Both of these works are necessary unto justification. Reverend McGeown can say all he wants that Christ

is the only “ground/basis” of justification. But his teaching about faith, “which is *not* God’s act,” undermines that entirely. There is some work, some activity, in justification that is not God’s. It is man’s.

Now, the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone stands or falls on this insistence: faith is in its entirety the work of God. When you make some part of faith—for McGeown the activity of believing—to be man’s activity and “*not* God’s act,” then you have added to the ground of justification.

The Arminians do nothing different. They also say that Christ is the only ground of justification. They speak about being justified for Christ’s sake and being justified by faith alone, but faith for the Arminian is man’s obedience to the call of the gospel. Faith is what man does to be justified.

Reverend McGeown does no differently. Faith is man’s activity, “which is *not* God’s act.” Faith is what man does to be justified. McGeown has also then added to the work of Christ. The only way that justification can be by faith alone and without works is that faith itself is in its entirety the work of God, not the work of man, and that faith brings nothing in justification but rests and relies on the work of Christ alone—or that faith is *passive* in justification. Reverend McGeown rejects both of these.

Beware Active Faith

This understanding of faith as man’s activity, “which is *not* God’s act,” is also how Reverend McGeown must be understood when he speaks about “active faith.” He writes, “We do not, of course, bring our works into our justification, but the faith by which we are justified is not passive. It is not a dead faith, but a living, active faith.” He does not merely mean by that term “active faith” that faith is an activity of the whole soul. He pretends that this is what he means. He plays word games with the terms *activity* and *passivity*. He speaks about faith’s resting in Christ and appropriating Christ and seeking Christ. He seeks to impress his readers with his learning by telling them that when article 24 of the Belgic Confession says that faith cannot be “unfruitful” in man, the French word for “unfruitful” is *oisive*. Then he says rhetorically, “I cannot even imagine what a passive activity would be!”

To all of which I say, “*Roi des cons.*”

He does not know and “cannot even imagine what a passive activity would be” because he does not know what faith is. He has never tasted the goodness of knowing what it means to do nothing for salvation and actually to rest in Christ alone and his work. Reverend McGeown claims faith for himself, and he teaches others to do the

same: “Faith is our activity...which is *not* God’s act.” That is his definition of faith. That is his corruption of the doctrine of justification.

It is in this light also that we are to understand his definition of *justification*. He writes, “Justification is God’s act of declaring believers righteous.”

I might have read over that were it not for McGeown’s redefinition of faith as man’s activity, “which is *not* God’s act.”

Now, if you plug that understanding of faith into his definition of *justification*, you arrive at this: justification is God’s act of declaring righteous the man who believes and whose believing is his activity and “*not* God’s act.”

But that is not justification. God justifies the ungodly. That is scripture. Romans 4:5 says, “To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”

In light of what Reverend McGeown is teaching, you must say that “worketh not” in the text includes his understanding of faith as man’s activity, “which is *not* God’s act.” McGeown has *man* working, and what man works—so much so that McGeown can boldly declare that it “is *not* God’s act”—is man’s activity of faith.

God does not justify the man whose faith is his own activity and “is *not* God’s act.”

Further, in the Romans 4 passage, the Holy Spirit says that God justifies “the ungodly.” The passage does not say that God justifies “believers,” as Reverend McGeown does. God justifies the ungodly man who believes that God justifies the ungodly. The ungodly man has nothing of himself, except sin. He does not even claim faith. His very faith is that he is ungodly, that he has nothing, and that even his faith is God’s work. *That* man God justifies.

But Reverend McGeown has God justifying the man whose faith is his activity, “which is *not* God’s act.” It is a total corruption, and a deceptive one at that, of the doctrine of justification.

He additionally corrupts the doctrine of justification because he adds to faith—as man’s activity to be justified—repentance as man’s activity to be justified. For McGeown says, “Repentance is a God-given and

God-worked activity of the believer...which God does not *perform* for us, and without which God does not forgive sin.”

The forgiveness of sin is justification. So for Reverend McGeown, God does not justify a man until that man *performs* repentance, which repentance “God does not *perform*” for him. McGeown not only has faith as man’s activity, which is not God’s work, but also repentance as man’s performance and not God’s. Without these two works of man, man cannot be justified.

Salvation Consists in Justification

This teaching ties in with McGeown’s statement that salvation is not “equivalent to justification.” He wrote that in defense of Reverend Koole’s theology that if a man would be saved, there is that which he must do:

In the minds of many, salvation is assumed to be equivalent to justification. Salvation, however, is broader than justification. Salvation is the entire work of God by which He delivers us from sin and brings us into the enjoyment of blessedness in body and soul forever. Salvation

includes our future bodily resurrection and our everlasting enjoyment of heaven in the new creation. Finally, salvation includes our conscious enjoyment of the benefits purchased by Christ.⁴

This is where many false teachers have begun in their assault on the truth that salvation is by grace alone.

I maintain that a Reformed man cannot say that justification and salvation are not “equivalent,” not if he understands the truth of justification. It is contrary to the creeds, which teach in words that almost exactly contradict Reverend McGeown that salvation does consist in (or is equivalent to) “the remission of sins.”

For instance, Belgic Confession 23: “We believe that our salvation consists in the remission of our sins for Jesus Christ’s sake, and that therein our righteousness before God is implied” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 51). This article of the Belgic Confession says that our salvation *does* consist in the forgiveness of sins.

Reverend McGeown denigrates this.

Article 23 says this because, as the creed points out, the

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ferently than Reverend De Wolf
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points out: all McGeown can talk
about is man’s activity, man’s
responsibility, man’s repentance,
man’s faith, man, man, man.

4 Martyn McGeown, “Faith: A Bond, a Gift, and an Activity, but *Not* a Condition for Salvation,” *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 52, no. 2 (April 2019): 3.

scriptures say this: “As David and Paul teach us, declaring this to be the happiness of man, that God imputes righteousness to him without works” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 51).

McGeown does not agree with David and Paul and the Holy Ghost that salvation consists in the remission of sins (justification).

How many other creedal articles are Protestant Reformed ministers going to deny before the membership wakes up and says, “We have a serious problem here. Things that the Reformed faith has taught for nearly five hundred years, our ministers are routinely denying”?

That salvation consists in the remission of sins is also what Abraham Kuyper meant when he said, “Justification begins to exist only as a result of our faith.” Previous to that statement, Kuyper said what he meant: “It is by this act of the Holy Spirit that the elect obtain the *blessed knowledge* of their justification, which only then begins to be a living reality *to them*.”⁵

Reverend McGeown, who apparently does not know the bliss of justification by faith alone, makes Kuyper’s statement about man and man’s activity. McGeown makes it about faith that is man’s activity but “*not* God’s act.”

By contrast Abraham Kuyper speaks about the act of the Holy Spirit. Kuyper says with the Reformed faith in Lord’s Day 7: “True faith” is that “which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 90). Abraham Kuyper, and with him every Reformed man, says that because salvation consists in the remission of sins and that remission of sins is by faith alone, faith is not what man does to be justified. Salvation is synonymous with the remission of sins.

If you do not believe that, you do not have any business instructing people about salvation. If you want to say that there are other benefits of salvation, that is fine, and I will agree with you. But if you say that salvation does not consist in the remission of sins, then I do not want to hear anything else that you have to say about salvation. By denying that salvation consists in the remission of sins, you show that you do not know the remission of sins and that you are up to no good. For in the same way that our justification is without works, so all our salvation is without works. When we are justified, we are as saved as we will ever be! Our justification is perfect. It is as perfect as the righteousness of Christ, and his righteousness contains the whole of our salvation. Christ’s righteousness is perfect, and he is perfect, and I am righteous by faith alone, and so I am as perfect as Christ is perfect.

Reverend McGeown understands nothing of this and has evidently never tasted that reality, so he begins his instruction on salvation by the absolutely idiotic statement that salvation is not “equivalent to justification.” It makes perfect sense that he would say that! There are spiritual activities that man must perform—by grace, of course—and that are necessary unto salvation, without which man is not saved, and that begins with justification. Without man’s performing faith—“which is *not* God’s act”—and without man’s performing repentance—“which God does not *perform* for us”—man does not enjoy his salvation, and he will not eternally enjoy his salvation. So Reverend McGeown also robs people of their comfort and happiness.

Modernism

McGeown says about the Reformed Protestant Churches,

The RPC teach that sinners are justified by the instrument of faith, but they reject all the activities of faith (believing, knowing, trusting, embracing, appropriating, etc.) as belonging to the instrument of justification. That is where they are developing in error.

Now, that is a patently false description of Reformed Protestant doctrine. What we in the Reformed Protestant Churches reject is those activities *as man’s doing*—which McGeown tells us emphatically “is *not* God’s act”—for justification. Thus we reject the Protestant Reformed doctrine that surreptitiously adds man’s activity to the ground of justification and thus of salvation.

I said previously that Reverend McGeown’s concept of *grace* is Pelagian and Arminian. Grace enables man to believe in this case. Believing is what man must do as his activity for salvation. Emphatically, faith “is *not* God’s act.” It is man’s activity. Grace enables man to perform repentance, which emphatically “God does not *perform*...and without which God does not forgive sin.” That is Pelagian and Arminian grace. That is Pelagian and Arminian faith. That is Pelagian and Arminian justification. That is Pelagian and Arminian repentance.

The whole blog piece “Passive Faith?” is about man and what man must do. The whole thing proceeds from the wrong starting point, which is man and his activity and not God and his grace. McGeown’s writing reads like the writings of the men in 1953 who departed from the pure Reformed truth. There is not a shred of difference between their condition of faith as a prerequisite to enter the kingdom and Reverend McGeown’s faith as man’s

5 Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, 334, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/k/kuyper/holy_spirit/cache/holy_spirit.pdf.

activity, “which is *not* God’s act.” They both make the faith of man to be what man does, what man’s responsibility is, what man must do to be saved.

This is what Rev. Herman Hoeksema said regarding that theology in 1953 at a congregational meeting in First Protestant Reformed Church:

Question: Do you consider the Reverend De Wolf and those who sincerely follow him and his preaching now as Reformed and as brothers in Christ?

Hoeksema: For the first I answer, No! I do not consider them Reformed. I cannot consider them Reformed, and I will not consider them Reformed until they retract and until they apologize...I do judge whether a man is Reformed or not Reformed, and I claim that the sermons of the Reverend De Wolf were not Reformed...Unless he retracts and the consistory retracts, I cannot regard them as Reformed, and I cannot regard the consistory that supports him as Reformed. I cannot...

Not only that, but now I am talking about that anyway, I want to issue a word of warning at the same time...I warn you that all the rumors that I hear and all the talk that is going on about *responsibility* and *the activity of faith* and the like runs not only in an unreformed way but will ultimately run you into modernism! That is not the gospel!

All that ever have opposed the Reformed truth have always accused the Reformed people and the Reformed leaders and the Reformed ministers of denying responsibility. That’s very easy.

All the talk about the activity of faith, about our [unintelligible word], about the Bible in distinction from the Confessions—all that talk is principally *modernism!* That’s my conviction. That’s much worse.

And therefore, although I’m not here to preach, I nevertheless feel it my calling to issue to all of you a word of warning with my whole heart. I have preached to you the Reformed truth for thirty-three years, and now many of you don’t want it

anymore! That’s up to you, but I’m going to warn you, nevertheless. It’s up to you to choose.⁶

Herman Hoeksema would have joined us in the Reformed Protestant Churches. He calls McGeown’s theology “modernism.”

McGeown does not a whit differently than Reverend De Wolf and others whom Hoeksema points out: all McGeown can talk about is man’s activity, man’s responsibility, man’s repentance, man’s faith, man, man, man. It *is* modernism.

If Reverend McGeown is not to be branded as a false teacher, let him repudiate his doctrine that faith “is *not* God’s act,” and with that let him repudiate his

evil doctrine that there is that which man must do to be saved and his defense of Reverend Koole’s theology that there is that which man must do to be saved. Until Reverend McGeown repudiates his deceptive theology, he is to be branded as a theological huckster with no Reformed credibility at all, as a deceiver, and as a dead branch.

He pretends to be Reformed. He uses Reformed language. But he is Arminian and Pelagian in his doctrines of grace. Consequently, he is Arminian and Pelagian in his doctrine of faith. Being Arminian and Pelagian in his doctrines of grace and faith,

he corrupts the Reformed doctrine of justification and brings up again the wicked doctrine of justification by works.

The trick that he uses to dupe his audience is the term “active faith.” He plays games with that term and attempts to confuse his audience that his “active faith” is the same as faith as an activity of the whole soul. This is a ploy. Reverend McGeown’s “active faith” has nothing to do with faith as an activity. Reverend McGeown’s “active faith” disguises his wicked doctrine of justification, by which he makes himself responsible for the perishing of his audience, who believes his false gospel that to be saved man must *do* something and that what man must *do* is his faith as his obedience to the call of the gospel and his repentance that he must perform to be forgiven.

Reverend McGeown admits that the Protestant Reformed Churches are striving with the Reformed Protestant Churches about justification.

You must understand that these two things—justification by faith alone and the unconditional covenant—go hand in hand. This is perhaps the advance that must be made: to link inextricably the doctrine of justification by faith alone and the doctrine of the unconditional covenant.

6 Herman Hoeksema, “First Church Congregational Meeting,” June 1953, https://oldpathsrecordings.com/?wpfc_sermon=the-history-of-1953.

This has always been the issue in the recent controversy and for years prior to it. It was a complete lie when the Protestant Reformed hierarchy said about its orchestrated assault on three ministers that it was *not* about doctrine. This controversy has *always* been about doctrine. The doctrine is justification.

That was the issue with the John 14:6 sermon, which brought this whole controversy to the Protestant Reformed broader assemblies. It was a justification issue. Because it was a justification issue, it was an unconditional covenant issue. The false doctrine that was brought in was the same false doctrine in De Wolf's sermons, which was condemned in 1953.

The theological atmosphere today is also the same as in 1953: it is all about man's activity, man's repentance, man's doing, and man's responsibility.

You must understand that these two things—justification by faith alone and the unconditional covenant—go hand in hand. This is perhaps the advance that must be made: to link inextricably the doctrine of justification by faith alone and the doctrine of the unconditional covenant. If you tinker with the doctrine of justification by faith alone, then you also tinker with the doctrine of the unconditional covenant. If you are not teaching justification by faith alone, then you are not teaching an unconditional covenant. If you do not teach an unconditional covenant—unconditional in its establishment, maintenance, experience, and perfection—then you do not teach justification by faith alone. Justification by faith alone is the condition of the unconditional covenant! Without justification by faith alone, there is no unconditional covenant.

Reverend McGeown and the rest of the Protestant Reformed Churches have corrupted the doctrine of justification with their *faith as man's activity that is not God's act* and with their teaching of *man's performing repentance*

that God does not perform for him. They have conditions as real as Klaas Schilder's conditions and De Wolf's prerequisites, although the Protestant Reformed ministers studiously avoid using the words too much.

Rev. R. Van Overloop used the word *condition*, but he was just testing the boundaries and the ministers and elders of Classis East of the Protestant Reformed Churches whether they could find it within themselves to condemn the statement as heresy—rank, calculated heresy.

The PRC have totally sold out the reformation of 1953; the churches have forsaken the truth of salvation by sovereign grace alone; and they have a covenant as conditional as that of Schilder and the Liberated churches.

One wonders how long it is going to take the Protestant Reformed Churches to join the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). The PRC is one doctrinally with the churches of NAPARC on the crucial issues of the covenant and the doctrines of soteriology. The PRC teach available grace and thus the offer of grace. The PRC teach that if a man would be saved, there is that which he must do. The PRC teach faith as man's activity, "which is *not* God's act." The PRC teach repentance as that which man performs unto his justification and which "God does not *perform*" for him. The PRC teach justification by man's faith and man's repentance.

In fact, after writing these things, one actually wonders whether, with the PRC's doctrine of justification, the churches of NAPARC will have the PRC as a member. NAPARC has prided itself on having rejected federal vision theology. If NAPARC takes the PRC as a member, then the organization will have taken the most sophisticated expression and advancement of federal vision theology into its fellowship.

—NJL

GOD'S TRUTH ABOVE ALL

Dear Prof. Hanko,

With much reluctance we take up the pen against your forum letter, in which you make reference to us for “the lack of obedience and submission to the elders in a local congregation.” We are saddened that you regard us as rebels who flaunt at and ignore God’s appointed authority over us in the church.

2. We heartily agree with you that members of a congregation must submit to the authority of the elders, which is submission to Christ. Where we sharply disagree on is the extent of the elders’ rule and where and why members of the congregation *must* disobey their elders where God’s Word calls them to. It is precisely the matter which you do not wish to enter into in your letter that is the reason we *must* disobey—the *doctrinal* issues of the controversy.

3. We also heartily agree with you that Christ is the Head and Lord of His church. It is fitting that you quoted Matt. 28:18 (“All power is given unto him in heaven and on earth”) to establish the truth that Christ’s rule is absolute and sovereign. We disagree, however, that the rule of His appointed elders in the church is absolute and sovereign. The rule of the elders is derived from Christ and limited to the scope of His Word. Christ tells in that same passage that His disciples must be “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). The implication of Christ’s command is that the disciples must not and may not be teaching others to observe anything that Christ has not commanded them in His Word. Our Belgic Confession underscores this truth when it says that the rulers of the Church “ought studiously to take care, that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, hath instituted” (BC Art. 32).

4. Where God’s appointed servants exercise their rule in the church, they do so only in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. They speak in the name of Christ: “Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience” (James 5:10). They admonish in the name of Christ: “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our

Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). They command in the name of Christ: “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us” (2 Thess. 3:6). Thus the elders rule on behalf of Christ and with His authority *only* when they rule according to His Word.

5. The fifth commandment teaches us that we must “show all honor, love and fidelity, to my father and mother, and all in authority over me, and submit myself to their *good instruction and correction*, with due obedience” (LD 39). Where those in authority do not give good instruction and correction—instruction that is according to the Word of God—the believer’s duty is to reject such instruction and correction. He does so, not out of defiance against God’s lawfully appointed authority, but out of love for and obedience to a higher authority that is God and His Word. On this note, the Belgic Confession further instructs us to “reject all human inventions, and all laws...thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever” (BC Art. 32). The believer’s conscience is subject to God’s Word alone.

6. The true church does not exercise absolute and sovereign rule over God’s people. In the true church, “all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church” (BC Art. 29). The false church, on the other hand, exercises absolute and sovereign rule by ascribing “more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ”; relies “more upon men than upon Christ,” and “persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors” (BC Art. 29). Only where the true church is “governed by that spiritual policy which our Lord hath taught us in his Word...everything will be carried on in the Church with good order and decency” (BC Art. 30).

7. When the elders of the church abuse their authority by demanding of its members what is clearly forbidden by

God's Word, God's people have a calling to disobey those wicked demands. Their calling is not to obey first, and then work with the church council by protest and appeal. When the church council commanded the apostles not to speak in the name of Jesus, the apostles "ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:42). When the church council threatened the apostles not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, the apostles' reply was: "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). When the authority of Daniel's day forbade him to pray to God, Daniel disobeyed the wicked order and carried on praying as God's Word called him to (Dan. 6:10).

8. We in CERC started a Bible study group to study and to speak the truth of the PRC's controversy. Out of love for God's Word, out of love for God's church, we are compelled to be a witness to His truth as that truth has been savagely assaulted over the last six years in the PRC's controversy. When our elders forbade us to meet, we refused their demand, believing that God's Word instructs to study and to speak His truth. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15); "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 Jn. 4:1). Their response to our holy endeavor was to discipline us.

9. We are not creating divisions in CERC by starting this Bible study group to study the controversy. We are promoting true unity in CERC by calling members of the church to study the truth of this controversy with us, to discern for themselves what false doctrines have been taught and what wickedness has been perpetrated against God's faithful servants. This unity is founded in Christ alone, Who is the truth. To continue keeping silent in

We are not creating divisions in CERC by starting this Bible study group to study the controversy. We are promoting true unity in CERC by calling members of the church to study the truth of this controversy with us, to discern for themselves what false doctrines have been taught and what wickedness has been perpetrated against God's faithful servants. This unity is founded in Christ alone, Who is the truth.

CERC where the Session has persistently refused to give instruction on the controversy over the last six years does not promote true unity. It promotes a carnal, worldly unity based on ignorance and indifference to false doctrine and wickedness.

10. We believe this to be consistent with the actions of your teacher and ours, Rev Hoeksema, when he opposed the Three Points of Common Grace both in his preaching and in his writings in the Standard Bearer. The standard ought to be the truth as explained in our Three Forms of Unity and confessions, and not in Session's decision when they are opposed to it. Having that truth, we witness and speak out against those that oppose it.

11. We plead with you as a father in Israel, one who has taught us precious truth, one who has been instrumental in helping us not only know but also love the Reformed Faith, one whom we respect highly for the Lord's sake.

12. We plead with you not to be blinded by the false doctrines that continue to be taught in the PRC. We list a few outstanding statements taught by PR theologians demonstrating a conditional covenant fellowship theology that has taken hold of the PRC. We all know that this is not what you taught the denomination in your decades of service to the churches.

"If a man would be saved, there is that which he must do...For until a man responds to the truth and call of the gospel by believing it, confessing it, he is not, and cannot be saved."¹

"In fact, the more faithful the saints are to God's law in the grace of Jesus Christ, the more they prosper in the great blessings of the covenant. They prosper in their marriages, in their family life, and in their church life. Above all, they prosper in the enjoyment of God's covenant fellowship."²

1 *Standard Bearer*, March 1, 2019, p. 254.

2 *Standard Bearer*, October 15, 2020, p. 28.

“Scripture teacheth that man must do something, that he may obtain the possession of the salvation purchased by Christ.”³

13. We plead with you to remember what you taught us in the Divorce and Remarriage controversy—that if we tolerate but one false doctrine, eventually the entire truth will be corrupted.

14. We plead with you to remember the sermon that you preached to us on the sin of Achan while you were here in Singapore—how the sin of but one man troubled the entire Israel because of corporate responsibility. With teachers of false doctrine running amok and not put out, why should judgment not fall upon the PRCA and us in CERC?

15. We plead with you to remember Eli—though he himself be a godly man and though rebuking his sons for their sins and yet, in not disciplining his sons, incurred the judgment of God in his generations. Today, false teachers are teaching us to commit spiritual adultery with works-righteousness, and are being tolerated. How shall we escape the judgment that must come? (1 Sam. 2:25)

16. We plead with you to recognize that God has raised His Samuels in Rev. Lanning, Rev. Langerak and Rev. VanderWal who today preach the truth of which you yourself would preach and war against the false teachers as you yourself would in the past against false teachers in other churches.

17. We plead with you to acknowledge that the controversy is about doctrine, not about non-submission to elders.

18. We plead with you, in love for your mother (PRCA), to “Plead with your mother, plead for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight” (Hos 2:2).

19. We plead with you to see the truth of our position, and why it would be disobedience to God if we were to stop our private Bible study meetings to study and to speak the truth of the PRC’s controversy.

With love for the truth that you taught us,

Aaron
Tian Loong
Leh Wah
Iva

Letter from Prof. Herman Hanko

Dear Forum members,

I had only one short article left of our series on God’s covenant, but I am interrupting that series with an article on an entirely different truth of Scripture. So I ask you to bear with me as I have prepared and now sent to you an article that I consider to be of great importance in our churches. Please read it carefully, and if you have any questions about it, please feel free to write me. Your Session and Rev. Kleyn have approved of it.

The Authority of Elders

That there is trouble in our churches (PRCA, CERC, PRCP) no one can deny. Because of it some members

have left the denomination to form groups or churches of their own. It is not my purpose in this article to enter into the doctrinal issues of the controversy, but it is my purpose to deal with a church political problem that is, from the church political point of view, the most important element in the split that a taken place. I speak of the lack of obedience and submission to the elders in a local congregation.

According to Scripture and our Church Order, the members of a congregation must submit to the authority of the elders whom God through Christ has set over the congregation to rule in Christ’s name. This is the teaching of Scripture, the Church Order and the *Form for the Installation of Office bearers*.

³ *Standard Bearer*, January 1, 2021, p. 150.

This is the arrangement of office bearers in the new dispensation's rule for orderliness in the church of Christ who insists that all things in his church must be done decently and in good order (1 Cor. 14:40). God established three offices over Israel in all the years of its existence: prophets, priests and kings. That designation of offices in Israel was necessary to bring orderliness to the life of the nation. The prophets brought to Israel the word of God; the priests took care of the poor (among the duties of bringing sacrifices in the temple); and the kings were anointed to rule the nation.

In the new dispensation, this arrangement remained in principle with Christ Jesus, the Head and Saviour of the church possessing all three offices. He is our Prophet, our Priest and our King. But Christ appoints office bearers in the church to take the place of the office bearers appointed in Israel: the prophetic office became the office of minister of the Word; the priestly office became the office of deacons; the kingly office became the ruling office.

We are interested in this article with the office of elder.

Elders rule over the church. They are, in the church, like the kings in Israel. They rule over the congregation, over the minister and over the elders themselves. (Their rule over their fellow elders is why the Church Order provides for what is called *censura morum* (Art. 81).

The Biblical passages that explicitly teach this authority of the elders are Hebrews 13:7 and 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13. The latter text reads: "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among them, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves." Hebrews 13:7 reads: "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."

These texts are very plain. The command of these texts is so urgent and compelling that to disobey them is great sin.

The point of these texts is exactly that the admonitions of the elders must be obeyed, because Christ who is the Head and Lord of his church rules his church through the elders. Christ's rule is absolute and sovereign. All power is given unto him in heaven and on earth. He rules over all: presidents in the state, teachers in the school, parents in the home, bosses in the work place. That Christ rules through those appointed to positions of authority, means he rules in fact; and in the church, his rule through elders is his rule over us in fact. If you would consult the *Form for the Installation of Elder and Deacons*, you would learn that all that elders and deacons are required to vow before Christ and Christ's church: "Do you believe that you are called by Christ's church and therefore by Christ himself?"

We live in an age in which authority is flaunted and ig-

nored. This disregard and rejection of Christ's authority, exercised against men Christ puts in office has entered the church as well. It is a matter of no little concern to me that within our own churches (The PRCA) during the years of my ministry, no less than three ministers have either been deposed or separated from their congregations for refusal to bow before the authority of their elders. When I was ordained as a minister of the gospel in 1955, this disregard for authority was not so. Ministers were subject to the rule of their elders. We recognized that elders ruled also over us as well as over the congregation. It was our duty to obey. And it was our duty as ministers of the gospel, that this same principle held for the member of the congregation. To obey our elders was to obey Christ himself. To disobey our elders was to disobey Christ. This great truth is the ground for decency and good order in the church.

Supposing that members of the congregation possessed the right to disobey their elders when they disagreed with what the elders decided; supposing further they went their own way and did what the elders told them not to do; what would happen in the congregation? Everyone would do what he wanted and the congregation would lose the unity that Scripture says is Christ's gift to the church (Ephesians 4:1-16). Then life in the church would become like life during the period of the judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). But now we have the Lord in heaven as our king. Do we know better than he? To do differently and go our own way is arrogance and disobedience to Christ. It makes me think of God's word, through Paul in the first verses of Philippians 2 where we are enjoined to consider others in the church better than ourselves – just as our Saviour did! To do otherwise is to commit the sin with which Paul charges the Corinthians in the first chapter of his first letter: in Corinth there was party strife and it tore the congregation apart. It was enough to charge the church with schism. Now we say, "I am for _____; I am for _____; I am for _____; I am for Christ. This is schism.

Those who claim to be acting in the name of Christ when they disobey their elders claim they have this right because they "must obey God rather than men," But the question is: Is this true? And the answer is that their claim is not true. It is not true because the church of Christ provides ways and orderly means to bring their objections against the elders to the attention of the whole denomination. That way alone preserves the unity of the body of Christ. They protest to the Session; then, if not satisfied, to the Classis; and then, if necessary to the synod. The sister churches of the PRCA also have the same procedure available to them – as is stated in the agreement to become sister churches.

Those who are trying to gain as many as possible to

their side object to this orderly procedure on the grounds that the assemblies are corrupt and will not submit to the Word of God; so it is no use to protest and appeal; so there is no use in appealing.

There are two things wrong with this argument. One is that the objection shows no love for the church of Christ as Philippians 2 requires of us. If one loves the church rather than one's own popularity, one does everything he possibly can to save it as it is represented in one denomination, which is his spiritual mother. Two, he sets himself up as judge of the whole church of Christ. After all, one must be prepared to say before the exalted Christ in that great day of Christ's return that he humbly sought the welfare

of Christ's church for which Christ, the great Judge gave his blood. And if he is prepared to do this, then he doesn't leave the church by taking as many of God's people with him; he doesn't shout bad names at the church; he doesn't try his best to make divisions in the church; he leaves with great sorrow in his heart and many prayers for forgiveness. He does this weeping and praying that God will surely care for his church.

In that way one honors, respects and obeys the fifth commandment and truly shows that he loves the cause of Christ in the world, and that he has, in good conscience done all he could to promote the glory of God and the bride of Christ.

CONTRIBUTION

HOEKSEMA, BAPTISMAL VOWS, AND THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

The main purpose of this article is to demonstrate that Herman Hoeksema believed that the baptismal vows are directly related to our calling to educate our children in the truth of scripture and the Reformed faith. Not simply educate but cause them to be instructed in the Christian school. And not simply a calling but a fulfillment of one's vows made before God at baptism. For Hoeksema the third question and answer of the baptism form can mean nothing less than a demand to send our children to the Christian school. And if we stand in the line of the Reformed faith with Hoeksema, we must have this view too.

In the lecture from which I quote below, Hoeksema outlines the main content of the baptism form in general and then proceeds to focus his attention on the second and third questions. Exhorting the parents, the form asks,

Secondly. Whether you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian church to be the true and perfect doctrine of salvation?

Thirdly. Whether you promise and intend

to see these children, when come to the years of discretion...instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your power?
(*Confessions and Church Order*, 260)

Regarding the historical context, this speech was probably given sometime in early 1954. The lecture was originally given for the men's society of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church and then given a second time in Doon, perhaps at the request of the minister, Homer C. Hoeksema. At the time, there was no Protestant Reformed school for children in the Protestant Reformed churches in Iowa.

With insight and skill, Hoeksema explains the relationship between the second and third questions of the baptism form. I urge everyone to listen to the entire lecture to be enriched on the baptism form as a whole.¹

For the purposes of this article, we will hear the last fifteen minutes or so of the lecture. Hear now from the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema.²

Hoeksema quotes the form,

1 The lecture is entitled "Baptismal Form Vows" and can be found on oldpathsrecordings.com under the "Lectures and Speeches" tab.

2 The following quoted section begins around the 1:00:00 mark of the lecture.

Whether you promise and intend to see these children, when come to the years of discretion... instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your power?

He continues,

You say that before God. That's the pledge, promise before the face of God.

Let me briefly, very briefly, explain the elements of that question. First of all we must instruct. What is that? What is it to instruct?

Instructing, according to the Bible, beloved, is to impart knowledge...from generation to generation.

In the second place, the question is, to whom must you impart that knowledge?

First of all, to the child of the covenant, the child that is sanctified in Christ...You impart knowledge. That does not mean that you... impart knowledge only to the elect. When you impart knowledge to the seed of the covenant, you impart the same knowledge to all. When you as parents impart knowledge to your children, you give the same treatment to all your children. You don't ask whether Pete is elect and Klaas is not elect. Oh no, you give the same treatment to all your children—the same instruction, the same admonition, the same punishment, the same chastisement, the same guidance. You give them to all, and you leave the fruit to God. That's all. It's not *yours* to make children of God. Don't forget that. You cannot bring children to heaven. *You* cannot convert a child. You cannot make spiritual children of your children. *God* does that. But you instruct them. You instruct them all alike...leave the fruit to God.

In the second place, about that child it says, "When it comes to years of discretion." When is that?

About that I would like to say just a few words, beloved. You know, the people of the world are wiser, frequently, than the people of God, also with regard to instruction. When a child comes into the world—you must never forget that from the very first moment when that child is

born—when it lies in the cradle, the whole world floods into the soul of that child from without. Through his eyes, through his ears, through his touch, through his taste, through his smell, the whole world floods into the soul of that child... And the world knows that so well, beloved, that it takes care of the child from its very infancy. Pedagogues, real pedagogues, will tell you that you must educate a child from the moment it comes into the world. Oh, yes. It must have a nice cradle with nice colors, soft colors, soft forms; it must not hear harsh sounds; it must hear nice music or nice songs; you must not speak loudly; you must speak nicely to that child because the soul of that child is flooded with all that you do.

That's modernism.

How about us?...

This I know, that all its surroundings have influence on the soul of that child.

Years of discretion?

When that child is a little older, beloved, when that child is about a half a year old, you have it sit at the table, and you try to have it say after you, "Amen," don't you? That's instructing the child. When the child is still a little older, you have that child repeat and say, "Lord, bless this food. Amen." That's instruction—don't forget it. *All these things* influence the soul of the regenerated child from its very infancy. Don't let us be foolish, but let's learn from the world that that is actually the case. And so it is throughout our whole life, beloved.

What must the child learn?

The child must be instructed in the aforesaid doctrine! In the aforesaid doctrine. That is, the three forms of unity, the Protestant Reformed truth³—in that the child must be instructed. According to its capacity, of course. But it must be instructed in the Protestant Reformed truth from its earliest moments and according as it grows up and according as it has capacity to receive—receptivity to receive the instruction. It must be instructed in the aforesaid doctrine! That's the idea of this second question.

Who? Who must instruct them?

The parents, beloved, the parents. Oh, yes.

3 Hoeksema speaks often in this section of the "Protestant Reformed truth." Briefly, that truth is defined by the historic emphasis upon "God is God, and man is nothing." That grace is always particular and sovereign in God's love for his elect and sovereign in the reprobation of the wicked. And that truth is that all things proceed from God's eternal counsel, with election governing the covenant. This "Protestant Reformed truth" is no longer wanted by the church that bears its name. Such expressions are foreign to the lips of any of its leadership. That truth, we may say, has been taken away from the denomination by Christ and given unto the recent children of the reformation known as the Reformed Protestant Churches.

You say as a parent in answer to this question, “I promise to bring up my child in the aforesaid doctrine. I do that. I do that.”

That’s also scripture. That was said in Deuteronomy 6, which my son read a moment ago... “And these words, which I command thee this day,”—that Israelitish parent—“which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand.”

Oh, how important, according to scripture, is this doctrine, the aforesaid doctrine in which a child must be instructed, don’t you see? That’s the heart, the basis of the church, beloved. The instruction, as far as *we* are concerned, as far as *our* calling is concerned, we must instruct our children.

And, of course, the parent cannot teach the children entirely. It also must teach through the church. Yes, also through the church. The child goes to catechism, goes to church. According to its capacity it hears the sermon. According to its capacity it’s taught in the catechism according to the aforesaid doctrine, beloved, until he comes to ripe years and makes confession of the faith of the Protestant Reformed truth.

Still more. The child also goes to school! Don’t forget that. Goes to school.

What school?

Public school? Oh no, of course not.

Christian school? Yes. What Christian school? What Christian school?

To the utmost of your power—to the utmost of your power—you instruct them in the Protestant Reformed truth. That means also, beloved, that to the utmost of your power you try to work for Protestant Reformed schools. Means exactly that. Means that. Oh, it would be so easy. Edgerton has one. I’m glad of it. Nice example. Follow it. Follow it. We have one in Grand Rapids. Hope has one. Redlands has one.

And the time must come, beloved, that we all unite to see the necessity of establishing Protestant Reformed schools. Don’t you see that? I cannot understand how Protestant Reformed people and certainly not Protestant Reformed ministers can be lax in organizing their own schools... Why should we have our children instructed in the doctrine of common grace, which we denied in 1924?

Don’t you see that this third question of baptism demands exactly that? You shall instruct your children in the aforesaid doctrine, that is, the Protestant Reformed doctrine, “or cause them to be instructed therein to the utmost of your power.” Please say yes before the face of God. And go home and say, “Lord, I said yes, and now I’m going to do it. I cannot lie before thy face.”

The relation is plain, isn’t it?...the relation between the second and third question. The relation is such that a generation grows up...and is faced with the same questions. “Whether you believe the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian

To the utmost of your power—to the utmost of your power—you instruct them in the Protestant Reformed truth. That means also, beloved, that to the utmost of your power you try to work for Protestant Reformed schools. Means exactly that.

church?” Unless that generation that follows you is instructed in the aforesaid doctrine, it cannot *answer* these questions. Don’t you see? That’s why it is so extremely important, beloved—not for a Roman Catholic church, not for a modern church that doesn’t care about the truth, but for a Protestant Reformed church that insists on the truth and should insist on the truth—that’s why it is so extremely important that one generation after another is instructed in the aforesaid doctrine thoroughly, completely, as thoroughly as possible, to the utmost of your power. Then, *then*, and then only, I expect a strong church. Otherwise I don’t. And God forbid that we should ever grow lax in regard to these principles.

May God impress it on your mind and heart so that you can never get away from it anymore! That is the life of the church!

I thank you.

—Elijah Roberts

DEBATING WITH THE DEVIL (5)

Introduction

My allegory continues with Shepsema, shaken by Thames' and Spaul's scolding, shuddering as they shame him: "Shepsema, where is your wedding garment? Can't you see? This is a royal wedding! You may not come in here wearing that! The King's wedding garment is required! Not your filthy rags! You have no wedding garment. You should leave!"

I now begin a longer and more difficult road of investigation as I consider Norman Shepherd's brief chapter on Paul's theology of justification.¹ In many ways the chapter reminded me of my boyhood days hunting rabbits in upstate New York. The thing with rabbits is that they can outrun you, and they know it. They'll run fifty yards and wait for you to catch up. Then, they'll run another fifty yards and repeat the procedure, figuring you're getting tired or lost. The way to outsmart a rabbit is to stand still—do nothing—and let your beagle chase him. Beagles love to run after rabbits, and after twenty minutes—sure enough—there's the rabbit. Rabbits always run in huge circles—never straight—coming back to where they started because that's where their hiding place is.

I use that approach in this article to deal with Professor Shepherd's brief chapter on Paul's theology of justification, because Shepherd sets a forest of over one hundred verses in front of the reader, making the trail of his thought quite a chase through the woods. I will not try to pursue him by examining every verse; rather, I will observe his trail and confront him at the end because he will return to his discredited starting point of justification by obedient faith.

Those who consider this lightheartedness inappropriate must realize that an ocean of conservative ink has already been spilled critiquing Norman Shepherd's federal vision theology, beginning before 1975 and culminating with Rev. N. Langerak's definitive articles in *Sword and Shield*, "Revisiting Norman Shepherd."²

Therefore, this article will not repeat those criticisms but will be confined to the scriptures Shepherd abuses.

Previously, I have taken James from Shepherd by demonstrating that James wrote that a man is *vindicated* by works, not by faith alone. James convincingly contradicted Shepherd's erroneous view of justification and with it his notion that James introduced some special meaning of the word *faith*.

In this article James will join with Paul—that is, Thames and Spaul—to fight against Shepherd's further abuse of what they wrote. While waiting for him at the end of his run, they will be rehearsing their song, "In Christ's coach they sweetly sing, as they to glory ride therein."³

Getting Started

Here is an overview of Norman Shepherd's theological trail, which leads the reader through a scripture forest that Shepherd believes verifies his view of justification. He begins by asking three questions and then answers each one in complicated detail.

His first question is, "What does Paul mean by justification?" (33). Shepherd spends three pages discussing this and lists twenty-six Bible verses in his answer of this question.

First, justification is the forgiveness of sins so that we are accepted by God as righteous and receive the gift of eternal life. Second, justification is the forgiveness of sins grounded upon the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. Third, the righteousness of Christ imputed for our justification is his death and resurrection for us and in our place. (33)

Shepherd's second question is, "What does Paul mean by faith?" (33). Shepherd spends four and one-half pages discussing this and lists forty-one Bible verses in his answer of this question.

First of all, justifying faith is faith in Jesus; but Paul can also speak of justifying faith simply as faith in God...

1 Norman Shepherd, *The Way of Righteousness: Justification Beginning with James* (La Grange, CA: Kerygma Press, 2009), 33–45. Page numbers for quotations from this book are given in text.

2 Nathan J. Langerak, "Revisiting Norman Shepherd," *Sword and Shield* 1, no. 14 (April 2021): 10–16; "Revisiting Norman Shepherd (2)," *Sword and Shield* 1, no. 15 (May 2021): 15–19; "Revisiting Norman Shepherd (3)," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 1 (June 2021): 16–20.

3 Edward Taylor, "The Joy If Church Fellowship Rightly Attended," <https://www.poeticous.com/edward-taylor/the-joy-if-church-fellowship-rightly-attended>.

Second, justifying faith is a penitent faith...

Third, justifying faith is not only a penitent faith but also an obedient faith. (36–38)

Shepherd's third question is, "What are the works that Paul excludes from justification?" (33). Shepherd spends five pages discussing this and lists twenty-six Bible verses in his answer of this question.

First, by "works of the law" Paul refers to the Mosaic covenant...the whole Mosaic system...

Second, by works of the law Paul means obedience to a limited selection of laws found in the Law of Moses and in the tradition...

Third, works of the law are works that are done without faith. (41–43)

Norman Shepherd begins by quoting James 2:24 and Romans 3:28, notes their differences, and then says, "Therefore we have the questions, what does Paul mean, and does he contradict what James teaches?" (33).

If I may make a few remarks about this opening gambit, it might help the reader prepare for Shepherd's loaded questions and convoluted answers.

Below are quotations of James 2:24 and Romans 3:28 in both the King James Version (KJV) and the English Standard Version (ESV), which Shepherd uses.

James 2:24

KJV: Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

ESV: You see that a person is justified by works and not by *faith alone*.

Romans 3:28

KJV: Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

ESV: For we hold that one is justified by faith *apart from* works of the law.

Shepherd's opening gambit about James and Paul reveals two things.

First, I have already sufficiently demonstrated that James wrote, "By works a man is *vindicated*" (not justified). This means that James and Paul are not in conflict and do not need to be reconciled. They are writing about two different subjects. But by creating a conflict and then proceeding to "reconcile" James and Paul, Norman Shepherd can present his theory as an

ingenuous theological solution. False. Paul had no such conflict with James. James said that he fully agreed with Paul (Gal. 2:9).

Second, I also previously demonstrated the biased language of the ESV that Shepherd prefers. Notice carefully the difference in the modifiers in Romans 3:28: "*without* the deeds of the law" (KJV) and "*apart from* the works of the law" (ESV).

Shepherd favors the ESV. Why?

First, consider the KJV's "without the deeds of the law." Paul explains his meaning further in Romans 4:5: "To him that worketh not, but believeth..." There, you see, Paul explains himself: "worketh not" means *no works!* That explains Paul's previous phrase, "without the deeds of the law." Paul writes that a man is justified by faith alone—he works not; he has done *no works*. This is as

Luke 18:14 teaches: the publican was justified *before* having done any works.

Then why does Shepherd prefer the ESV? (And this is true throughout his book *The Way of Righteousness*.)

Because, as previously pointed out, the modifier *apart from* supports his theory that a person is justified by an obedient faith that is *doing* the works of repentance—"doing justice,

loving mercy, and walking humbly with your God" (45)—but those works are *apart from* or *separate from* faith when God justifies the believer. In this way Shepherd can say that he believes in justification by faith. Also, those works previously mentioned, Shepherd says, are not "works of the law," which Paul excludes from justification (41–45).

Moving on, Shepherd's trail of scripture quickly passes over Romans 1–2, getting him to Romans 3, which notes the universal condemnation of the human race and the introduction of God's righteousness, which Shepherd then "explains" and which "explanation" is important for understanding his theology of justification.

Shepherd begins his explanation with two paragraphs, which he says are taught in Romans 3:25. They are some of the smoothest and subtlest paragraphs you will ever read. Here are Shepherd's words:

This revealed righteousness *is* the sacrifice of atonement offered up by Jesus Christ on the cross (v. 25) and this propitiatory sacrifice demonstrates the justice of God...

Paul makes clear that justification is the forgiveness of sin grounded in the righteousness of Jesus

The word of God demands our savior's lifelong righteousness to qualify him to make propitiation for the sins of his people, and that lifelong righteousness is imputed to them in their justification.

Christ. That righteousness is his propitiatory sacrifice offered on the cross in obedience to the will of his Father in heaven. When Paul says in verse 28 that a man is justified by faith, he means that his sins are forgiven by faith. This faith is faith in the blood of Jesus (v. 25), and the blood of Jesus atones for sin. (34; emphasis added)

These two paragraphs hustle the reader through an “explanation” of Jesus’ atonement, God’s justification, Christ’s righteousness, the forgiveness of sins, faith, and the blood atonement of Christ—some of the weightiest subjects in scripture made “clear” in five sentences! Quite an accomplishment, if true.

The last paragraph is a good sample of the whole book. With its many tightly woven statements—joined by our old friend *is*—it moves the reader quite quickly over Romans 3:25. *Too quickly.* By doing so, Shepherd hides his corruption of the text’s true meaning, while the reader’s attention is too busy trying to hold together so many vital aspects of God’s word to realize it.

I will demonstrate that this paragraph is a crafty series of limiting statements that conceal rather than reveal God’s righteousness. I call to your attention the last sentence: “This faith is faith in the blood of Jesus (v. 25), and the blood of Jesus atones for sin.” Keep that in mind.

Here is Romans 3:25: “Whom [Christ Jesus] God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.” We must carefully consider every word.

“Spiritual discernment is the skill of distinguishing truth from error. Spurgeon famously said that the real difficulty in discernment is distinguishing what’s true from what’s almost true.”⁴

Romans 3:25 answers a most fundamental issue of biblical theology and by doing this exposes a major fault in Shepherd’s theology—one on which his view of justification stands or falls. That most critical issue is whether Christ’s lifelong righteous obedience is included in his atonement and therefore is imputed to believers in their justification. Romans 3:25 teaches that it is.

Shepherd denies this. That is why you did not read it in his quick paragraphs about justification. And that

is why I called attention to his last sentence: “*This faith is faith in the blood of Jesus (v. 25), and the blood of Jesus atones for sin.*” Here discernment and attention to detail are demanded if we are to distinguish “what’s true from what’s almost true.”

In Romans 3:25 Paul uses the Greek word *ἱλαστήριον*, which is translated as “propitiation,” to describe the setting forth of Christ as a display of God’s righteousness. By using that word, Paul alludes to the high priest’s day-of-atonement ritual of going into the holy of holies with blood to pour on the mercy seat.

How do we know that? We know it because in the Greek Old Testament the mercy seat is called the *ἱλαστήριον*, the same word that Paul applies to Christ. And we know that the mercy seat was in the holy of holies, where the high priest went once a year with blood (Ex. 25:21; Lev. 16:13, 15). Literally, Romans 3:25 says, “Christ was set forth as the mercy seat.” That detail is vital to understanding the verse.

That same Greek word (*ἱλαστήριον*) may be translated as *the propitiatory act* or *the mercy-seat act*. That is, God set forth Christ as the mercy-seat act, the act in which the high priest sprinkled the blood on the

mercy seat.

Paul is saying in Romans 3:25 that there is the great display of God’s righteousness. Christ is “set forth” as the great antitype of that climactic high priestly ritual on the day of atonement. Christ is the sacrifice; it is his blood. He is also the high priest who brings the sacrifice. And his cross is (figuratively) the mercy seat on which the blood is poured. The crucifixion of Christ displays the *propitiatory act*, the *ἱλαστήριον* (Ex. 25:21; 30:7; Lev. 16:13, 15; 17:11). Romans 3:25 is about the revelation of God’s righteousness through the *high priestly act* of Jesus’ offering his own blood on the cross.

That is quite similar to what Shepherd wrote. However, by merely saying, “This righteousness is the sacrifice of Christ,” he left out the most critical element of the *propitiatory act*—the element on which it all depends and without which it all fails.

I will demonstrate this in what follows.

First, remember Nadab and Abihu! They were Aaron’s sons and anointed priests. They were bringing to God the sacrifice. But they died! They were struck with fire

[Christ] was the spotless Lamb of God when he presented himself to be crucified. Because of that fact, he was accepted by the holy God for the propitiatory act that displayed God’s righteousness once for all.

⁴ Quoted from John MacArthur, *Grace To You* newsletter (December 10, 2021).

from the Lord (Lev. 10:1–2). Why? Because they did not follow carefully all God’s holy requirements. By either ignoring or despising them, they offered strange fire on God’s altar. By that incident at the very beginning disclosure of the atonement-day ritual in Leviticus, God would have us realize the absolute holiness of his requirements for sacrifices, and he solemnly warned anyone who would ignore those requirements of the condemning judgment of his holiness.

Shepherd does a Nadab and Abihu, but he doesn’t tell his readers. How? Like Nadab and Abihu, Shepherd ignores God’s holy demands. He leaves out the most critical element for an acceptable sacrifice.

What is that most critical element? That Christ “offered himself *without spot* to God” (Heb. 9:14). Without spot! That is the critical and decisive element!

“Without spot” refers to the qualifications of the typical Old Testament animal sacrifice, of which our savior was the great antitype (Ex. 29:1; Lev. 1:3, 10; 22:19–24; 23:18; Num. 28:19, 31; 29:2, 8, 13, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 36; Ezek. 43:23, 25; Mal. 1:7–8).

If we divide the sacrificial event between the antecedent life of the animal and the actual presentation of the animal for sacrifice, clearly the antecedent conditions of the animal’s life were in view when the animal was either accepted or rejected as *spotless* or *not spotless*. That decision was based on the antecedent conditions of that animal’s life because God had said to Israel, “[The] blind, or broken, or maimed...ye shall not offer these unto the LORD” (Lev. 22:22). Brokenness, blindness, maimed, and diseased were all conditions that occurred *before* the animal’s presentation for sacrifice and not *at* its presentation.

Therefore, it is clear that the term *spotless* refers to the condition of the sacrifice prior to its presentation, namely its antecedent life. In other words, in the spiritual realm relating to our savior, *spotless* would definitely refer to his lifelong spiritual condition prior to his crucifixion—that is, his lifelong righteousness—and *not* simply his obedient sacrifice on the cross, as Shepherd teaches.

Therefore, the preceding life of the sacrifice is *not* a nonessential condition but *the vital condition of acceptance*. The acceptance or rejection of the sacrifice terminates on its complete preceding life. Most significantly, then, the righteousness of our savior’s preceding life determines his acceptance or rejection by God! If our savior’s spiritual condition had not been faultless (sinless), he would not have been acceptable to God as a sacrifice, and his blood poured on the mercy seat would have done nothing; worse, his sacrifice would have been an abomination, as were those Old Testament sacrifices of blind and crippled animals (Lev. 22:31; Deut. 17:1;

Ezek. 43:23, 25; Mal. 1:7–8). Remember Nadab and Abihu!

Scripture abundantly testifies that this *spotless* condition was fulfilled by Christ’s *lifelong* sinless obedience: he was born sinless (Luke 1:35); as he confessed in Luke 2:49, even in his boyhood days he was obedient to his Father’s will; at his baptism in the beginning of his ministry, he was already the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36); in his whole earthly ministry, he was fulfilling all righteousness (Matt. 3:15); and his own blessed testimony, “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” (John 8:46), proves that he was the spotless Lamb of God when he presented himself to be crucified. Because of that fact, he was accepted by the holy God for the propitiatory act that displayed God’s righteousness once for all (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5; also, only the spotless sacrifice is a sweet savor to God [see Lev. 6:15; 8:21; Eph. 5:2]).

So we see that the matter of “without spot” makes all the difference between acceptance and abomination! Between propitiation and blasphemy! Christ’s lifelong righteousness—his spotlessness—is the ultimate issue, one that cannot be avoided or denied, as Shepherd does. Shepherd, by disregarding this ultimate issue in the qualification or rejection of our savior’s propitiatory act, is like those Old Testament Israelites who brought the blind and the lame. They ignored God’s holy commandment (or worse, despised it). Those sacrifices mocked God, and the prophet condemned them:

7. Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible.
8. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts. (Mal. 1:7–8)

By this same judgment must Shepherd’s words be judged.

First, he denies that God’s holiness demanded lifelong spotless righteousness for Christ’s sacrifice to be acceptable. Therefore, Shepherd’s doctrine of justification is a denial of justification (Lev. 10:1–2; 19:7–8; 22:31; Num. 16:31–32; Ezek. 43:23, 25; Mal. 1:7–8; 1 Cor. 11:29).

Second, he denies that Christ “offered himself *without spot* to God” (Heb. 9:14), meaning that Christ’s lifelong righteous life was included in his sacrifice. “The life of the flesh is in the blood” (Lev. 17:11). Therefore, Shepherd’s doctrine of Christ’s sacrifice is a denial of Christ’s propitiation and satisfaction.

Third, Shepherd denies that Christ’s lifelong righteousness is imputed to believers in their justification

for their eternal peace with God (Rom. 5:1). Therefore, Shepherd's doctrine of justification is a denial of the gospel.

This explains why Shepherd's chapter on Paul's theology of justification is basically smooth words describing Christ's sacrifice, while at the same time subtly denying it. It is no different than the Israelites' telling the priest, "Don't worry about that broken leg!"

Remember how zealously our savior, as the true high priest, cleansed the temple of those who were selling oxen and sheep (Matt. 21:12–13; John 2:13–16). Surely, he was demanding that God's *requirements* of temple holiness be observed. How much more would the people have been thrown out of the temple if those animals had been blind or crippled? The Lord Jesus Christ himself drove out of the temple all those who would *disregard* God's requirements of holiness. That would include Shepherd also. Christ's blessed zeal for God's house is our savior's own testimony that he was a *spotless* sacrifice; a lifelong divinely righteous sacrifice; the only sacrifice that would be acceptable to a holy God (Ps. 69:9–13; Luke 9:51; John 4:34).

11. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;
12. Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.
13. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:
14. How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:11–14)

Now we know why Romans 3:25 refers to that final act, to Christ's blood being shed.

First, "the life of the flesh is in the blood" (Lev. 17:11), and "without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22).

Second, the giving of that spotless *life* is the final moment—the climax—of the once-for-all fulfillment of the high priestly sacrifice, satisfying the demands of righteousness that vindicate God in his justification of sinners.

Third, the giving of that spotless *life* is the historical moment of the accomplishment of God's eternal counsel of redemption.

Fourth, the giving of that spotless *life* is the concluding act of obedience, whereby the incarnate Son of God *vindicates the triune God's justice and righteousness for all eternity*: "That he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26; Job 34:10, 12; Ps. 89:14; Matt. 25:31–46).

To put this matter simply: if Christ's sacrifice does not include the lifelong divinely righteous obedience of the Son of God, he is *not* a spotless offering but an empty sacrifice rejected by God (Mal. 1:7–8). Then, there is no propitiation. No atonement. No forgiveness. No display of God's eternal justice and righteousness. Then, Satan has mocked God. He has defeated the Son of God. There is no gospel. We are still in our sins. That is the seriousness of Shepherd's teaching on justification. It is a victory for the devil. And, as I have said previously, Satan's subtle debating seeks to destroy the whole truth of God, not just part of it.

I have taken the time to go into some detail on Romans 3:25 because it is profoundly important.

It is important, first, because it illustrates regarding the cornerstone of Shepherd's theology what I have previously pointed out in connection with passages of scripture that Shepherd abuses (James 1:21; 3:1; 4:12; 5:7, 9, 12; Matt. 25:31–46). Shepherd takes only parts of verses and twists them to suit his conclusions, rather than explaining those passages in context and detail. He cannot explain them in context and detail because if he would, the passages would contradict him.

Second, many have rightly criticized Shepherd's positions with sound theological reasoning. What was also needed was a sound exegetical basis for the condemnation of his view of justification.

Third, his very orthodox-sounding words are persuasive until one realizes that they are an evil abuse of the verses he supposedly explains.

Fourth, he abuses scripture with a purpose: to teach a justification without the righteous lifelong obedience of Christ imputed to believers, thereby making necessary their lifelong obedience (that is, their obedient faith) as a condition to be fully justified, sanctified, and glorified. Shepherd's theology lays a foundation for a conditional salvation and a conditional covenant.

He is seriously wrong. The word of God demands our savior's lifelong righteousness to qualify him to make propitiation for the sins of his people, and that lifelong righteousness is imputed to them in their justification, negating any condition of obedience on their part for their justification, salvation, glorification, and eternal fellowship with God. They have robes of righteousness. Shepherd does not!

After "explaining" Romans 3:25 and 28, Shepherd

proceeds to the broader context of Romans. He says that his conclusion is confirmed in that broader context: “This conclusion from the immediate context of 3:28 is confirmed in the broader context of Romans” (34). Remember his conclusion: “Righteousness is his [Christ’s] propitiatory sacrifice offered on the cross” (34).

Not really. Here is Shepherd’s real conclusion, with his own limitations added: (Limited) righteousness is Christ’s (disqualified) propitiatory sacrifice offered on the cross and rejected by the will of his Father. That is Shepherd’s real conclusion. Shepherd’s view cripples Christ’s propitiatory sacrifice. And that faulty conclusion Shepherd will incorporate into his further exposition of Paul’s theology of justification.

Going on to Romans 4:1–6, Shepherd says, “Paul describes justification as the imputation of righteousness *apart from* works of the law” (34). This is a curious statement because the English Standard Version in Romans 4:5 speaks of “the one who does *not work*.” Notice the difference: Shepherd says, “*Apart from* works.” But the ESV says, “Not work,” meaning *no works*.

Where does Shepherd get the words *apart from*?

From Romans 4:6, again in the ESV: “Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness *apart from* works.” Here Shepherd quietly uses his preferred wording, which supports his view of justification by obedient faith “apart from works,” that is, *separated from works but not without them*. This is why he does not use verse 5 from the ESV, which says, “To the one who does *not work* but believes.” That verse Shepherd quietly passes over. Quite revealing. The phrase that contradicts his whole system he quietly ignores. “Does not work but believes” reveals the fraud and deception of the federal vision’s dogma of *working faith*. No wonder Shepherd hides that phrase.

Shepherd continues with Paul’s exposition of justification in Romans 4 and says that in verse 6 “Paul describes justification as the imputation of righteousness apart from works of the law.” Then, Shepherd says, “David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works” (34). The KJV translates verse 6 this way: “Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness *without works*.” In light of the words “does not work but believes” in verse 5 of the ESV—*no works*—the KJV translation of verse

6 is obviously correct, and the translation “righteousness apart from works” in the ESV is a mistranslation, perhaps even a biased translation. Again, Shepherd is wrong and continues to abuse the scriptures, as he did the epistle of James. But Shepherd will hold to that mistranslation because his theory depends on it.

From that context (Rom. 4:1–8), including Psalm 32:1–2, Shepherd next says, “Here Paul virtually defines justification as the forgiveness of sin” (34).

Again, that is a curious conclusion because in Romans 4:1–8 Paul writes about Abraham’s justification, including the imputation of righteousness through faith (v. 3), as well as blessedness through faith (v. 6). So it seems, according to verses 1–8, that justification includes far more than Shepherd allows. Justification is not just the forgiveness of sins. From verses 1–8 justification includes the imputa-

tion of the *lifelong* righteousness of Christ, the forgiveness of *all* the believer’s sins (past, present, and future), as well as the present and eternal state of *blessedness*! And especially note: all of these blessings are imputed to the believer “*that worketh not, but believeth*” (v. 5).

Here again, we find Shepherd’s serious abuse of scripture continuing. So far, in the first section of his chapter on Paul’s

theology of justification, Shepherd corrupts Christ’s propitiation, rejects Christ’s righteous obedience, confounds God’s display of righteousness, and confuses the reader about God’s justification. All with words as smooth as oil.

What follows Shepherd’s explanation of Romans 4:1–8 is a series of statements that basically repeats his interpretation of our savior’s blood being offered for the forgiveness of sins. Shepherd says that in Romans 4:25 Paul writes, “[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” Shepherd adds this comment: “By his death Jesus paid the penalty for sin” (34). Shepherd then summarizes that Jesus’ resurrection “certifies that the penalty for sin has been paid in full and that therefore the justice of God has been satisfied” (34–35).

These are all true statements in themselves and seemingly based on specific verses of scripture, so that the unwary reader now agrees with what has been said. However, when Shepherd’s qualifications and limitations are taken into account, these statements mock the word of God instead of explaining it. They are all leading statements that take the reader to this summary question: “What is justification in Romans 3:28?” (36).

If Christ’s sacrifice does not include the lifelong divinely righteous obedience of the Son of God, he is not a spotless offering but an empty sacrifice rejected by God.

Shepherd's answer:

Justification is the forgiveness of sin so that we are accepted by God as righteous and receive the gift of eternal life. The ground of justification—the basis on which forgiveness is granted—is the suffering and death of our Lord. This is the one act of righteousness imputed to us for our justification. (36)

Summary: the omissions and denials in these statements have been pointed out. That makes them misleading and deceptive. To arrive at his conclusion, Shepherd omits Christ's righteous obedience, thereby falsifying Christ's propitiation and God's revealed righteousness and ultimately falsifying God's justification of sinners. What remains is the crippled sense of God's truth; and when that is rightly understood, Shepherd's statements are actually a trampling of God's courts that does not vindicate God as just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus; neither do they faithfully represent the Son of God in his covenant service.

However, when it is faithfully understood that justification includes the imputation of Christ's righteous *life* and sacrificial death and that the blood of Christ is understood as representing his whole divine, righteous life (Lev. 17:11), only then his propitiatory act displays forever that God is just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus. Only then is there the forgiveness of *all* a believer's sins and the state of *present*, ongoing, and eternal *blessedness in fellowship with God*. Only then are these blessings received through a faith created by the Word and Spirit of God in a person who "worketh not, but believeth" unto a salvation that is all of grace, all of Christ, all unconditional, and all vindicating God in his righteous judgment, for the eternal praise and glory of God (John 12:28; 17:1; Rom. 4:4; 11:36; Heb. 1:8; Rev. 4:8; 19:1–4).

The word of God demands our savior's lifelong righteousness to qualify him to make propitiation for the sins of his people, and that lifelong righteousness is imputed to them in their justification, negating any condition of obedience on their part for their justification, salvation, glorification, and eternal fellowship with God. They have robes of righteousness.

This ends Shepherd's explanation of his first statement under the first question regarding Paul's theology of justification: "Justification is the forgiveness of sins so that we are accepted by God as righteous and receive the gift of eternal life" (33).

We now know what Shepherd plans to sell us in his next statements: "Justification is the forgiveness of sins grounded upon the imputation of the righteousness of Christ" and "The righteousness of Christ imputed for our justification is his death and resurrection for us and in our place" (33).

Post Mortem

Here are some things Norman Shepherd has previously written.

Norman Shepherd teaches lifelong forensic justification, that is, at initial faith and at the last judgment.⁵

This lifelong forensic justification corresponds to his view of the covenant, which is conditioned throughout by man's faith and obedience (read, *obedient faith* [his theses 19, 23]), and *not* election! Note that well: man's *working faith* determines the outcome of the covenant of grace for Shepherd, while election has effectually nothing to do with the covenant. ("The decree," Guy Waters concludes, "has no meaningful connection with or relationship to Shepherd's covenantal perspective."⁶)

Norman Shepherd's view of the covenant is diametrically opposed to the unconditional covenant governed by God's decree of election and sovereign grace, which we believe and which the Canons of Dordt teach (2.8). In his explanation of the covenant, Shepherd necessarily holds to a conditional covenant, a covenant divorced from predestination, that makes all the covenant promises dependent upon the condition of obedient faith (of man) and not God's sovereign grace and election.

For these reasons Shepherd's theology is the true church's greatest enemy in terms of historical development, because in Shepherd's theology the complete

5 See thesis 4, in Norman Shepherd, *Thirty-four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works*, <http://horns.org/theologia/norman-shepherd/the-34-theses>. These theses were presented to the Presbytery of Philadelphia of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on November 18, 1978.

6 Guy Prentiss Waters, "The Theology of Norman Shepherd: A Study in Development, 1963–2006," in Robert L. Penny, ed., *The Hope Fulfilled: Essays in Honor of O. Palmer Robertson* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 207–31.

Reformed order of salvation is taught, but with every blessing of God's covenant cleverly gained by man's "obedient faith"—man's doing—and lost without it. Only by "obedient faith," according to Shepherd, is a man justified (a lifelong process), only by "obedient faith" is a man sanctified, and only man's "obedient faith" keeps him in the covenant, finally justifying him at the last day of God's final judgment (theses 32, 34). For this reason Norman Shepherd and his followers insist that they are thoroughly Reformed and that they believe we are justified and saved by grace through faith (that is, "obedient faith" or "working faith").

Finally—and ominous—is the fact that Norman Shepherd grounds many of his theses in statements of the Westminster Confession of Faith (for example, theses 10, 13–14); and *most* ominous is a statement the Westminster Confession of Faith makes and Norman Shepherd frequently and prominently uses: "Faith...is the alone instrument of justification; yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces" (XI:2). That confessional statement, basically saying what Shepherd is saying, contradicts

Luke 18:14 and Belgic Confession 24, which says, "It is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 53).

Confirming this ominous state of affairs for the Reformed churches is the decision of Mid-America Reformed Seminary to affirm Norman Shepherd after he was dismissed from Westminster Theological Seminary by allowing him to teach at Mid-America Reformed Seminary and to serve on the board of trustees.

Even more curious is the emphasis of the covenant of works and the decision to follow the statement of the Westminster Confession of Faith in Mid-America's *Doctrinal Testimony Regarding Recent Errors*, that "faith is never alone, it is always accompanied by repentance and obedience," contradicting Belgic Confession 24. The *Doctrinal Testimony* states, "We deny that justifying faith justifies believing sinners because of any of those *other graces that do always accompany it*."⁷

Next time, the Lord willing, Shepherd's next two statements regarding Paul's theology of justification.

—Rev. Stuart Pastine

Bound Volumes

The board of Reformed Believers Publishing is proceeding with plans to bind the first volume year of *Sword and Shield*. If you would like your issues from June 1, 2020, through May 1, 2021, bound in hardcover, you can either drop them off at the offices of RBP during regular business hours, or you can deliver them to one of the board members. The board has extra copies to fill any holes in your collection. The board will also be binding several of its own extra copies for purchase. Pricing is still being determined and will be announced as soon as possible.

⁷ Mid-America Reformed Seminary, *Doctrinal Testimony Regarding Recent Errors*, statement of the board and faculty, May 2007, 40, <https://www.midamerica.edu/uploads/files/pdf/errors.pdf>; emphasis added.



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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL!

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? — John 6:67

Such is Christ's question always. Many today have answered that question. They belong to the multitude that has left Christ, as the Galilean multitude left him standing with only twelve men; and one was a devil. The same question confronts the church now. The doctrine is clear. The issue is the same as it was when Christ questioned the twelve: the sovereign grace of God in salvation or, as Christ said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." Will you have man and his responsibility decisive in salvation, or will you have God and his grace decisive in salvation? Because of this issue, multitudes that followed Christ follow him no more. Do you want to go away too? Hear Herman Hoeksema in 1953 on the issue.

That group teaches that it depends on our effort whether we enter into the kingdom of God. Oh, I know they camouflage this business, but that's exactly what it means! When you say that our act of conversion is a prerequisite to enter the kingdom of God, you make the entering of the kingdom, of granting the kingdom of God, depend upon our act, and they mean that too... Oh, they talk differently. They talk about the *activity of faith*. They talk about the *responsibility of man*... The responsibility of man? That's not a problem... *Activity of faith*? What nonsense is that? Anybody believe that faith is not active? Anybody believe that? Anybody believe that man is not responsible? What nonsense is that?... Just because it is nonsense, they like to appeal to that stuff... If you teach that our act of conversion is a prerequisite to enter the kingdom of God... modernism it is, and don't ever think it is anything else!... Anyone teaches that... does not teach the Christ... Christ says we are translated by the Spirit of God out of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son without any effort of our own. Efforts are the fruit, not the condition. Now, do you understand? Will you also go away?... Make up your mind before God and before the church! Oh, the disciples made up their mind; of course they did; they had faith. They had faith! Except Judas. He should have... gone. The disciples... without any hesitation... made up their mind... If you need any time to decide on the question, will you go away... you better go. The disciples didn't need time... Peter didn't say... "O Lord, give us more time!... Give us a day or two or... a week to decide." Oh no, no, no. On the spur of the moment, he said, "Where shall we go?... Don't you see?... We have no place to go if we can't be with thee, Lord!" They had no place to go. That's the choice... of faith—the sure, inevitable choice of faith. "Where shall we go?... No matter if everybody leaves thee [and]... we stand all alone... Lord, we didn't choose... Thou chooseth us! Thou gavest us the faith. Thou drawest us to thyself. We can't help it!" Oh, it's a conscious choice, all right. Oh yes, we choose. "O Lord, we choose. But it is... all thine own choice." Let it be that! For you too! Otherwise, it is no good. Let it be that. And why?... It's remarkable how clearly it flashed through [Peter's] mind all of a sudden. I think he didn't even understand all he said... Peter didn't simply say, "O Lord, no. Why should we go? Can't stay with the Galileans. We must go with thee." No, no. He had a reason too... "Thou hast the words of eternal life." That was the reason: Christ!¹

Activity of faith? Man's responsibility? Active faith? They camouflage this business! They mean prerequisite but are too cowardly or devious to come out with it. When you hear about faith as man's activity, which is not God's act, then you have come up against one who camouflages this business of conditions. The issue is the same: will you have God or man? If you have to think about it, then you had better stay with those who say, "Man." If you come to the truth, then the only reason had better be Christ.

—NJL

¹ Herman Hoeksema, "Christ as the Sure Choice of Faith," June 28, 1953.